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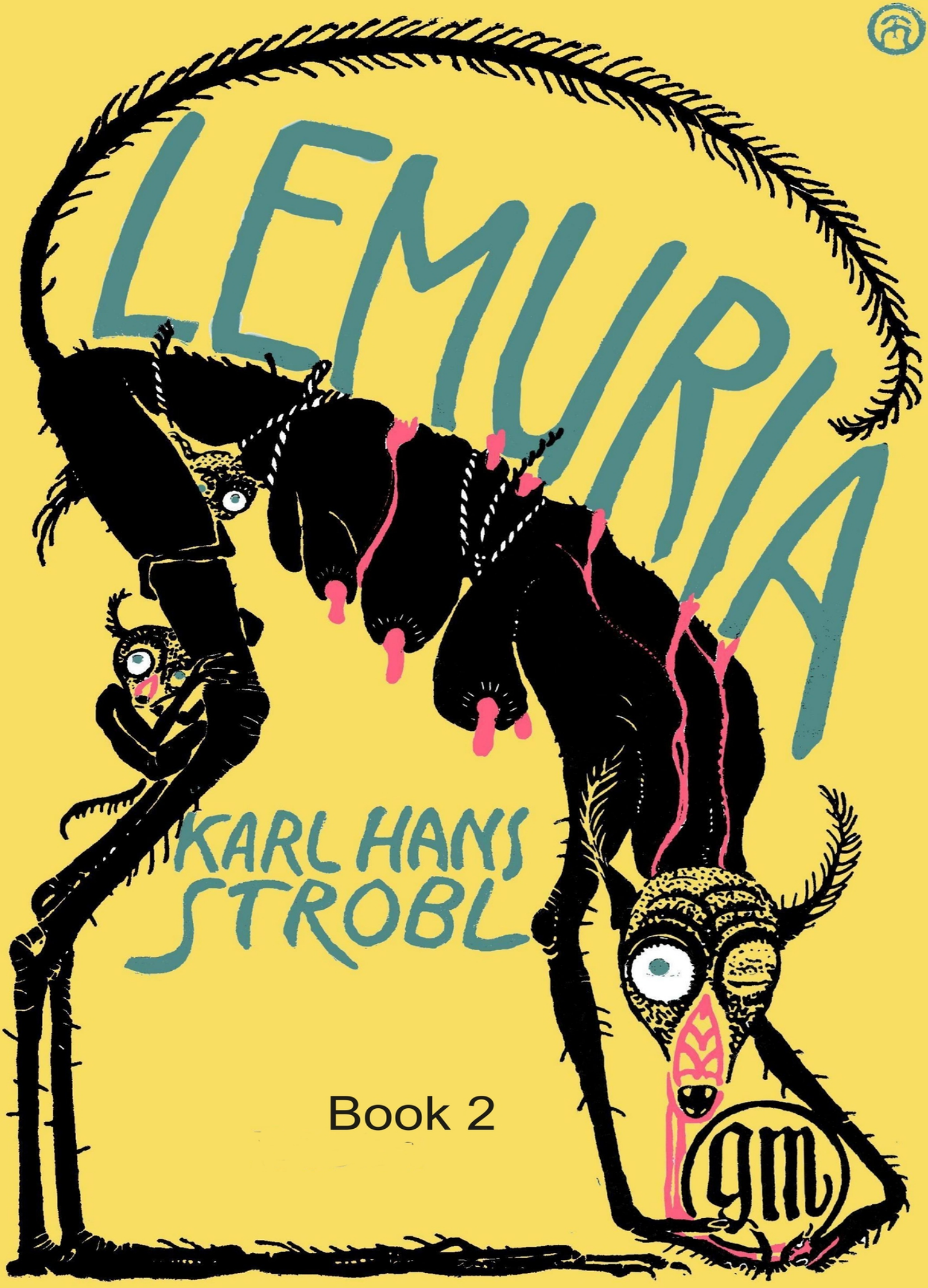

KARL HANS STROBL

Book 2

gm

Lemuria

Book 2

By

Karl Hans Strobl

Translated by Joe E. Bandel 2023

Original Illustrations by Richard Teschner

This book is dedicated to all those who love these old stories and find something in them that does not seem to exist in today's literature! Check out more of my translations and writing projects!

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Contents

Karl Hans Strobl

Karl Hans Strobl (born 18 January 1877- died 10 March 1946) was one of Germany and Austria's most popular writers. An Austrian by birth he grew up in Moravia and attended the University of Prague.

He was a prolific writer of both fiction and nonfiction. In 1919 he edited the world's first fantasy magazine, **Der Orchideengarten**. He was especially known for his short stories of dark fantasy fiction and **Lemuria** was considered one of his best collections.

During World War I he was a war correspondent and journalist. His early writings show him to be an environmentalist, against capitalism and industry. He was also a type of pagan and anti-religion in the modern sense; but with a marked value and appreciation of intense living and the supernatural. These themes mark his early works that I have translated so far.

There is a lust for living and for self- empowerment that is missing in

today's artificial world. I leave it to the reader to decide if this is a good thing or not.

After World War I, like many others, he became embittered at the unfairness with which Germany and Austria were treated and became solidly nationalistic and pro-Nazi. This is the reason not even his early works have been translated until now.

I have found these early stories to be quite remarkable and intend to translate more of his early works. I feel that he is an important writer and that an understanding of German and Austrian culture as it existed prior the World War I cannot be truly understood until more German literature from this period is translated and examined.

Lemuria Book 2 completes the stories from the original book **Lemuria** and adds several more stories from **Die Eingebungen des Arphaxat** plus one story from **Kokain**.

I think that only after these two volumes do we get some idea of Karl Hans Strobl as an author and what to expect from other stories, but that still leaves the novels to explore. On my list to translate is:

Ghost on the Moor

Eleagabal Kuperus 1 & 2

-Joe Bandel

15 June 2023

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Forward

I

Dear Karl Hans Strobl,

At that time in April 1915 when you came to our quarters, we still didn't know each other personally. We had written to each other for 10 years more or less—but that was the first time we had seen each other eye to eye. At the time we were quartered in Zsolna, the general headquarters of the army, to which we were attached from Teschen. The war sky was oppressive and muggy; the premonition of coming events lay in the air and drove us as war correspondents day by day to answer questions from Teschen.

A stocky, well-built tourist climbed down from the Vienna fast train which we had used to bring us here to Zsolna. Your powerful, chiseled, and blond bearded head was not recognizable from your photo. We, in our blasé city suits noted, with experienced smiles, your fully equipped field gear as the naivety of every

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beginning war correspondent who believed they would be traveling straight away into the line of fire.

Well, we soon understood that for you, a hiker in your blood, the high stockings were not a costume, but instead your normal garb and astonishingly versatile in their use. Indefatigable, you waded through an ocean of shit in Galacia, climbed to lonely watchtowers high in the Alpine snow and beat your way through the trackless and frozen wastes of the Albanian mountains, guided by those miserable markers, which were only

of use to a blind and groping primitive people. The municipal quarters which were a welcome rest for us, were for you only a departure point for fresh and joyful adventures throughout Slovakia.

The secret which was unveiled at Gorlice was strongly guarded. As the German military transports began to roll through Zsolna, they shoved us war correspondents into the Slovakian back ground at Nagybicscse. The rest of us were feverish with inpatient expectation—you, in the meantime, in the continually strong equanimity of your soul, wrote in your upstairs room in the old castle, which became a genuine writing studio. You made use of the time working on the second volume of your "Bismark" and made pilgrimages along the way to the nearest good wine taverns.

Then came the great blow, the historical world storm that relieved the universal tension with thunder and lightning. Our special train left after that thunder; we sat in the back of the last open car, the one that carried our automobiles. You, I and the American shot at tthe iron rails beneath our dangling legs and tore up the young spring landscape in our flight. The *Lusitania* had been sunk, and in the flawless blue sky Mr. Conger saw every new little cloud coalescing together, which two years later would grow into a new world storm.

What did we care about all that! Yes, we led the victory! You, for your part, had not participated in that first autumn and winter where we crouched in remote corners like sad chickens, always startled once again by the drum beat of the war's destiny. That was when we traveled from Dukla to the heights of Tatra, then again with headquarters across the Carpathians back to Sandec, and after the Serbian disappointment we were thrown back into Slovakia, where a restless winter's sleep began. Up until then you had seen the world from the watchtower of your Leipzig editorial office—now you wanted back into your Austrian homeland and came straight away in the spring with the victory march.

Later through coincidence we were no longer together at the front. But then after we came back, we met again at headquarters. There was one evening; it was far removed from the war and helped us escape from its murderous spell. You, Karl Hans Strobl, sat there at the piano, your stocky legs were somewhat spread, not unlike the great master Gottfried Keller in the Stauffer Berns etching. You played well and with fearless

accompaniment. The wine glasses added a golden shimmer to your playing. You also had that in common with the state writer from Zürich, you liked a good drop.

Your student years at Prague armed you and made you immune to it over time, when beer and more beer was cheap. We knew of this time from your three novels—books of a flaming heart, of one that was young and impetuously demanding. The surgeon thinks that your heart is not entirely intact—what does a surgeon know of a poet's heart, (said with respect), which derives its nourishment from all of nature, even the young life around it and never ages!

II

Where, I have often asked myself, where do you get all the time to write? Your day appears to be completely filled up—it always appears that way, no matter what title you are using: driver, editor or war correspondent —daily labor and then recovery. Yet this is all unimportant compared to the most substantial—the strongest value which is rooted in your writing, which is equally your greatest work output. We once calculated that the number of your books had already climbed to over 30; and that altogether there must be over 100,000 copies scattered throughout the world.

Not everything that you write can be measured equally, but everything comes from out of a fountain that appears inexhaustible. Without the restraints of a man of letters, which you apparently and passionately take yourself for, you give form to the inspirations of your fantasy; at times cheerful and with untroubled hand; at times with the heavy knowledge of cultural history; at times out of the abundance of the stories, which are your demons.

The first period of your creativity already lies another half decade back. Your student years still rise up in three novels: "Vaclav's Pub", "Schipka Pass" and "The King's Tavern at Przemysl". There is nothing special in them. Hundreds begin the same way. But what is special about these three novels is the atmosphere of the times from out of which they grew, the background which lends them historical relief. Your University was Prague then and the time was the bloody confrontation between the Czechs and the

Germans. You, a native born and loyal German, naturally stood on the German side and yet you sifted it out and perceived it honestly. Alone—and that is, with your temperament especially conspicuous—there is no hatred in these early books, which the young you justifiably had the right to feel.

You preserved the gallant tradition of the duel where men cross blades and thereby measure their own strength against that of another; the greater the opponent, the greater the honor, which can grow or be defeated in battle. From childhood you stood in close relationship to your Czechoslovakian neighbors, were familiar with their history, their speech, their songs, their music and their colorful sense of loyalty, without lapsing into a blind raging hatred or party dogma.

Because of this and because of your fresh, unvarnished will these novels come from out of a Prague that today stands demolished. Their value has been preserved. Staackmann was right, most thankfully, to republish them in his publishing house. In conclusion the future Strobl is still hidden within them.

Yet your latest heroes, the unsteady Matthias Merenus and the eternally strong Bismarck, also take their first victories on the dueling floor; your student double, Binder, who in nightly encounters with Tyco de Brahe, is still a little awkward with the inner play of transcendentalism in the beginning, and is later soaked with your rationalism; and the finale of “Vaclav’s Pub” is at once the quintessence of your writing: life in its entirety, rejoicing— beautiful, passionate and bloodily cruel.

It is the lust for the things of this earth without distinction that guides your pen and turns sad circumstances into cheerful ones—as it does in “The Four Marriages of Matthias Merenus” or surrounding the small peasant affairs of the German Middle Ages in which your “Three Companions” is set, or turns completely around the family sorrows of the great Corsicans, in which Pauline's sisterly hand unmistakably slips in a human—all too human tragi-comedy.

The self-portrayed student adventurer has grown into a historian, who always brings those same human instincts into the cultural worlds of other times. In the “Brothel of Brescia” it is the Italy of the 13th century that you conjure up in a firebrand of the senses, and the “Three Companions” take

place in your homeland of Brünn as it was after the 30 years war; in the “Beating of Bad Paulette” it is the Elba of the exiled kaisers.

In this way your style transforms itself into the conjured up spirit of the times; from boyish student to thoughtful and deliberate chronicler; from wild flickering visions to an epic serenity that is tangible next to Master Raabes comfortable pain and Fontaine's well placed irony. Your Bismarck completely captures the pithy German of the old one himself, whom you placed in a three volume monument; with poetic freedom of detail, but full respect for the essentials of a world historical figure that is imbued with the political problems, the Bismarck problems that were his life.

To me, as a low German, it will always remain astonishing how striking you are with low German— never forgetting, that it is a German-Austrian, who gave us the first Bismarck novel—the first, that can justifiably carry that great name, because he mastered the chosen subject with the artistic hand of a poet.

“The Bismarck”, who is now appearing in another volume, with the third to follow, is one of your two chief works; the other is “Eleagabal Kuperus”. In this massive novel; in which the moving powers of the time: The juggernaut of capitalism is set against the considerate, artistic and inventive spirit, which you have timelessly documented. It centers around the figure of a large, lovable magician, Eleagabal Kuperus, who becomes the symbol of your powerful gigantic work of art and encompasses motive and subject; world chaos within the solar system, becomes the original theme of the novel; completes it, enriches it and threatens to explode it. No other German author today has this extravagance and abundance of inner story experience, which gathers together into one novel what others have not pulled together in a dozen. With far-reaching and majestic gestures “Eleagabal Kuperus” combines in one work what is collected here in a half dozen short stories; the triumph of the poetic “will” over its inherent boundaries.

In this inspired work your fantasies contain everything that makes life powerful and human: vitality and powerful emotions, sensual pleasures, cruel instincts and the will to power. A will, which even in death will not rest, which greedily crosses into the transcendental and from out of which returns home with ghosts, vampires, devils, witches, fairies and lemurs.

Sexual insatiability becomes a vampire in “The Tomb at Peré Lachaise” and in “Bloodletters” lives are extinguished in their spiderlike nets. Sexual guilt hounds sister Agatha, “The Wicked Nun”, through the centuries; jealousy drives the stabbed Laertes actor to revenge and once more take on form and mask, premature death and love calls the student Bettina, and the shadow player back from the grave.

The boundaries, which have supported time, space and death, have fallen here. Time and timelessness, the present and beyond, all flow into each other. Yet during your travels to the front you have hunted down ghosts and found the devils which instigate the machines of this war just as they have done with all the others. The effect is very uncanny, when senseless intellectualism in our visible world combines with the fearful condition of dream and over excited nerves to become a phantom that is half real and yet immaterial.

Here fantasy is creative and self-determining; it creates a world within our world; enriches us with unheard of adventures of the instincts, with experiences of the natural division, of which our “I” is the spiritual portion, and within the blood and dreams where unsuspected possibilities lie; where the common citizen unleashes his inner demon. Everything that is unleashed helps with that:

Sexuality, lust for pleasure and drink. In that the old masters of the fantasy novel, Poe and E.A. Hoffman, are in agreement, it is the unimaginable and uninhibited in the compulsions of the instincts, that are more brutal in their final consequences, and masterpieces like “The Wicked Nun”, “The Tomb at Père Lachaise”, “The Manuscript of Juan Serrano” are comparable to the most masterful stories that both of these conjurers of spirits succeeded at. By the way, what I have been speaking so much about —the reader of this collection can determine for themselves.

It is far from me to solidly nail the theme of your ghost stories. In these kinds of short stories you have proven the same kind of expertise; and your last book, “The Crystal Ball and Other Stories” is witness to it. And even with all this: your previous list of works is so imposing and you are not finished yet; instead you create out of an abundance that continues to surprise us. In this sense I greet the old Karl Hans Strobl, whom I and a hundred thousand along with me wish to thank, and at the same time greet

the new one, whom I am very happy to have as a wartime—and hopefully soon, peacetime comrade.

Leonhard Adelt.

Rodaun, 10 may 1917

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The Case of Lieutenant Infanger

Yes, it's true, I still don't look well. I don't want to convince myself that I am already completely healed. But this much is undoubtedly true, I am much better than before. And I will soon have gotten over everything. Of course, it was a serious illness and it was strange enough, all the more strange because it had nothing to do with my body originally. How did it happen? Yes -it’s true, you can't really get a picture of the matter from all these newspaper reports. The story has caused quite a stir. And it has also brought me enough Inconvenience. I might have only needed to be less reticent to bring some clarity to the confusion right away. But a peculiar shyness has prevented me from speaking about it in public. To you, however, my trusted friends, I will tell the entire story as it seems to me in context. Whether I am right in my view of the story, however, cannot be irrefutably proven. As is well known, the investigation has been inconclusive. But it cannot be much different than how I experienced it. And with this then the proof is given that the strange powers of man, as we have come to know them in the phenomena of hypnosis and suggestion, are still capable of being subject to an outrageous increase.

Secrets are known to the old cultures of the East, which we are hardly able to suspect. And in my case I would like to speak most— if it would not be too daring — of a wireless telegraphy of the will, of a long-distance effect which does not need any line. I have occupied myself for a while with the philosophy of technology. There is much talk about organ projections. All our inventions are nothing other than imitations of the organs and functions of our body. The telescope has its model in the human eye, the hammer imitates the clenched fist connected with the arm, and the wire of ordinary telegraphy corresponds to the system of nerve cords. One can readily assume that a new and surprising invention always has its equivalent in ourselves.

Now — this recently emerged wireless telegraphy corresponds to the strange phenomenon of which I have to tell you. By the way — I do not want to anticipate your judgment. Everybody should look for his own

explanation. It was, as you know, on May 18. I had made a bicycle trip beyond Optschina to the high plateau of the Karst. I am a passionate cyclist. If there is one thing I sorely miss about my job as a lieutenant at sea, it is cycling. It gives me great pleasure to whiz along. I am indifferent to motorcycles and automobiles. What I like most is to use my own strength to move as fast as possible. If I can at all, I go on a bike tour with every longer stay on land. We had arrived in the port of Trieste two days ago, and at once I romped to my heart's content. On the day of which I speak, it had been summer hot and I was quite exhausted when I returned to Trieste at dusk. I had to hurry, because the officers of our cruiser had an invitation for the evening, which at least I was immensely happy to accept.

The road dipped a little and I could give myself up completely to the pleasant feeling of gliding without danger. In the twilight in front of me I vaguely noticed the hulking shape of an automobile whose lantern had just been lit. The machine was stopped and a few people formed a group next to it. One seemed undecided on how to continue on his way, because at this point the road forked in three directions. As I approached, one of the men stepped toward me and tipped his hat in greeting. I noticed in the flicker of the lanterns that the man had very peculiarly opposed eyes and almost no eyebrows at all. He asked me in very bad German for Görzer Strasse. From here it was rather difficult to find one's way around, so I pulled out my map to make myself quite understandable to him. At the moment when I bent down to push the map into the circle of light of my lantern, I felt a sudden, but not at all unpleasant, pressure on the top of my skull and lost consciousness.

I awoke in complete darkness. The street details of my cycling map were still clearly imprinted on my brain. I had been able to trace them from memory without further ado. But I remembered that I now had more important things to do. The awareness of a great danger was alive in me and I remember that I was not at all surprised to find myself in a situation about which I could not at first give myself any information. I was bound hand and foot and immediately after I came to consciousness I began to work systematically to free myself from the ropes around my wrists. Suddenly I heard breaths coming from beside me. I needed to know who was in this room with me, so I asked, at the risk of perhaps getting hit over the head again by a guard.

"Where are we?" a voice asked back from the darkness.

It seemed very familiar, this voice, with its peculiar greasy coloring. I replied that I had no idea where we were. Then, to put an end to the back and forth of questions and answers, I added my name.

"Ah ..." said the other in surprise, and after a little while he added, "I am Baron Latzmann."

So I had not been mistaken. An acquaintance was lying next to me, bound hand and foot like me. Baron Latzmann, the war correspondent of a major newspaper, who had been with us in East Asia when it was against the Boxers. It was strange enough that we had both been caught and brought here, to this room filled with impenetrable darkness. In low voices we told each other how we had fared. The Baron had fallen into a trap just like I had.

He had always been a great chaser of women and had lately been pursuing an adventure in which the attainment of his goal seemed particularly enticing and rewarding because of the inaccessibility of the woman. Just today a message had been brought to him that would open the doors of happiness for him. He had followed the directions. He had been expected at the designated place and, as happens in Italian novellas, had been led in a roundabout way to a lonely house. He had to stay in a room completely covered with carpets. The baron did not know what had happened to him. He suspected that he had been stunned by some odorless gas. While the Baron was narrating, I had noticed a soft sound for which the sailor has a fine ear.

"Do you know where we are?" I asked, when he had finished, "we are on a ship. I can hear the gurgle of water against the ship's side. The ship is lying still ... we are still in the harbor."

"But where — where do they want to take us."

His voice was anxious and agitated. Suddenly, a jolt went through my entire body from my head to my toes and I felt my fingers go rigid. I think I must have let out a little cry, a sound of surprise, a gnashing of my teeth, what do I know...

"What's the matter with you?" the Baron asked me.

All at once a memory had appeared before me, with all the colors and all the frantic movement with which it had taken place.

"Do you remember ... do you remember," I said, "the pagoda of Chi-nan-fu?"

It was ridiculous to ask if he remembered. One does not forget such

experiences. Of course, what just made me remember that moment on the pagoda of Chi-nan-fu, would be difficult for me to determine. Was it only the same feeling of impending danger, then as now, the feeling that accompanies grotesque dreams? Or the fleeting impression of the stranger's face who had asked me for directions. The position of the eyes, the tawny glow of the skin? I don't know. I only know that the scenes in the pagoda were now before my eyes in full clarity. Baron Latzmann had been on the train to Peking, had helped valiantly in the battles against the insurgents, and had sent interesting reports to his newspaper. After the invasion of the imperial city, he succumbed to the lavish life of the upper class victor. No sooner had the connection with the coast been established, when once more the opportunity was offered for gallant adventures. Venus followed on the heels of Mars.

The local beauties and the ladies who followed the columns from the big port cities entered the competition. A merry circle formed around Baron Latzmann and his girlfriend Hortense, a cute boisterous Frenchwoman. Some officers of our detachment were also part of it. And one day an excursion was arranged to the pagoda of Chi-nan-fu, a marvel of Buddhist sacred art. I accepted the invitation I had received, and I must say that the Baron was excellent at getting his guests in the mood. There was quite a bit of drinking going on and we were already in quite a noisy mood when someone suggested that we should finally see the inside of the pagoda, for which we had actually come. We formed a solemn procession and, singing and imitating the usual ceremonial, crossed a small wooden bridge to the temple. Passing some grumpy priests who reluctantly opened the door to us, we entered. There was a fragrant dimness in the room. On its high dais, to which a narrow stairway led up, sat the holy Buddha image with its fixed smile, and its hands folded over its belly. It was dressed in precious silk robes. Despite the objections of the temple servants, we climbed the steps to get a closer look at the image.

The Statue was apparently ancient, formed of clay and had a strange inward look. It sat facing the stairs. Suddenly it occurred to Hortense that she should see how the sacred vestments suited her. Some of us who still retained some prudence tried to hold her back. Most, however, applauded; and egged on by them, Hortense tore off the statue's garments and slipped them on. She did this with the dexterity and grace that distinguished her, so quickly that the priests in the dark room below were still standing rigid with

horror when Hortense had finished. The Buddha sat there, with his belly thrust forward, clad only in a loincloth. The wench turned in her robes, grabbed them with spread fingers and began to dance a minuet. A furious shouting broke out. Suddenly a little old priest was standing in the middle of us. No one had seen where he had come from.

He was as ugly as a monkey and foam came out of his mouth. In his hand I saw a crooked knife, and before I could form a thought he had thrust it twice into Hortense's breast. The Baron and I rushed at him, seized him, and threw him headlong from the high platform. A terrible uproar arose. Next to me someone fired a revolver at the priests, of whom the entire temple room was now swarming with. But no effect of the shots could be seen. A convoluted crowd rushed to the staircase of the esplanade, clung to the railings, and welled up the steps. We saw that we were lost. With one look I communicated with the Baron. We threw ourselves on the Buddha statue, grabbed it and with the use of all our strength we tilted it forward. It stood on the edge for a moment, I know I saw its blank smile once again, and then it fell over, crashed down on the wooden stairs and broke them under its weight. The attackers were pulled down and crushed. There was a bursting and crashing. Dust rose in a dense cloud. A diabolical howl followed. When the dust cleared, we saw that the sacred Buddha image was in ruins. But the staircase was gone and we could now better defend ourselves against the attackers. It took about half an hour, until a patrol of our marines arrived, sent after us by a caring comrade from Peking. That was our experience at Chi-nan-fu, the memory of which had come to me so suddenly. The Baron was silent for a while after I had spoken. I heard him breathe hastily.

"What do you mean?" he then asked, "how did you come to think of Chi-nan-fu?"

"Have you never thought that this scene might have another sequel?"

I had never thought of it either. But in the suspense of those minutes, it was as if I had always considered the possibility that I might encounter something again that had to do with the battle in the temple.

"We desecrated a shrine at that time. The two of us smashed the Buddha of Chi-nan-fu. If there is one great passion in the nature of the Asian, it is revenge and cruelty."

"It is really most strange that we two of all should have been brought here in such a way," said the Baron, and it could be heard that he was

forcing himself to speak calmly. "We must get away from here."

"Certainly. Please, after you!"

That was quite the ironic tone again, which the Baron valued as a sign of manly courage in danger. I considered for a moment. Then I rolled over on the floor in the darkness until I felt his body next to me. I have entertained you often enough with the surprising tricks I learned from a Japanese juggler during my stay in East Asia. I have taken thorough lessons. Among the things one must know is how to untie tangled knots. This came in handy for me now. I brought my bound wrists to Latzmann's hands and let him help me. After he had loosened the knot a little, it took me only a quarter of an hour to free myself completely. In a few minutes the ropes were then also removed from the baron's hands and from our feet. By the light of some matches we examined our prison. It was a rather spacious ship's cabin. We found the door firmly closed, of course, and a board was nailed over the hatch. We had to proceed with all caution and could not keep the light on for more than a few seconds at a time, for we heard footsteps above our heads, and something seemed to be stirring on the planks and also in the passageway outside.

There was no other way for us to escape than through the hatch. With combined forces, we soon had the planks torn loose, working as silently as possible. A dull glow, the scattered light of the harbor, and the shimmer of the sea came into the room. Fortunately for us, the frame of the hatch was made of wood and was so rotten that with some effort we were able to pry it out of the ship's side. Then we squeezed through and slid, bruised and scratched, into the water. We had left our jackets and vests behind. Slowly and carefully, with long strokes, we swam between the ships, after we briefly agreed that we did not want to return to land immediately, so as not to fall into the hands of our pursuers again. It must have been quite late at night. It was very quiet in the harbor, the ship stood still in the water; we swam through the jagged reflections of the shore lanterns, past the Molise and came out on the Porto Nuovo. The black masses of the warehouses with the cranes raised menacingly above them remained behind us. Now we turned toward Barcola and swam along the beach into deeper and deeper darkness. It was time for us to get out of the water. Our clothes were heavy and stiff and hindered our movements.

We stopped at a small stone causeway that jutted into the water and climbed into a boat that was tied up there. What to do? We sat there

shivering with cold, despite the fact that the night was warm and pleasant. Or was something else to blame for this shivering. You know me and you know that I am not fearful. But it may well be that fear also had a little part in that tremor at the time. The uncanny certainty with which they had taken possession of us, the mysterious hands that had been suddenly stretched out toward us - it must be admitted that this gave some cause for uneasiness. And I saw with ever-increasing distinctness the distorted monkey-face of that priest before me whom we had thrown down at that time; I saw the foam at his mouth.

"I think it best," said the Baron now, "if we remove ourselves from Trieste for a few days. Our trail must be lost."

He said what I had been thinking. Yes, of course, that was the best way. And we had to leave immediately, just as we were, without hesitation. For the time being, we could stay in one of the small Istrian coastal towns. I had five more days of shore leave, and then I needed to return to our cruiser. The Baron, who had nothing to do in Trieste, could have his affairs put in order by a trusted man and then go sideways into the bushes. We felt much better after we had made this decision. We had given in to one of the powerful instincts, the instinct of self-preservation, and this establishment of harmony gave us new strength.

Quickly we loosened and pulled out the pole to which the barge was chained and threw it into the boat. Then we grabbed the oars, put to, and took a good grip. We circumnavigated the harbor in a large arc, far out, where no glimmer of the beach reached. We watched the constellations rise and fall and saw the dawn approaching. The Waves were gray as lead and beat against the edges of the boat with dull knuckles. We hurried on, driven by the single desire to escape the domain of this mysterious power. Never in my life did I pull so persistently and powerfully on the oars as I did then. We made rapid progress. Already Trieste lay far behind and the morning was coming up brightly. Above our heads were red clouds, and the drops that fell when we lifted the oars were like drops of blood. Suddenly I started up. I winced and looked at my companion. He, too, looked at me, with open staring eyes in which there was an immoderate horror. One will seek in vain looking for an explanation for what was happening to us. What was going on with us was clearer than I can describe it. It was the same type of impression which our awake senses convey. A call had gone out to me. A hard, imperious call. It contained the order to immediately stop our escape

and to return. It was the order of one who had the absolute ability to command me. And when I looked at the Baron, I knew that it had happened to him in the same moment. The power that was bent on our undoing was about to subjugate once more those who had escaped. Hesitantly, the Baron lifted his oar out of the water. He sat, turned back towards me and kept looking at me with those horrified staring eyes.

At last he told me in a sluggish, foreign voice: "We have business in Trieste. We forgot something, we have to turn back."

I knew, however, that we were lost if we let ourselves be overpowered. Nevertheless, it took me a terrible effort to resist. I wanted to speak, but my voice was gone, out of reach of my will. And struggling to form words, I felt a cutting pain in my head and guts. Never before had I experienced anything like it.

At last, after overcoming a choking fit, I groaned out, "No! Go on!"

But no sooner had I said this than I felt like I had committed a crime. My conduct instilled disgust in me. It was as if I had violated something sacred. And I longed to be good, to follow the command, and to be consistent with myself. But still there was something that resisted. An unknown force that I did not know how to name, but which I trusted because it seemed to me that I must have trusted it many times for my own good.

The Baron still sat huddled there. His gaze was now averted. He shook his head.

"Take the oars," I shouted at him. "Forward." He obeyed hesitantly.

And I, too, put in again. But the oars were as heavy as iron bars, and when I plunged them into the water it was as if I were trying to move an immense mass. The most terrible thing was that I despised myself and that this feeling increased with every stroke of the oar. Our progress was slow. All at once the Baron pulled in his oars again and turned around.

"I don't want to," he said, "I'm turning back."

A change had taken place in the expression of his face. His eyes had acquired a treacherous lurking look. I saw clearly that he hated me. He was beside himself with anger that I kept rowing.

"All right," I said wearily, "turn back, but first I want to get ashore."

I thought later about how it was that he submitted to the order so unconditionally, while I nevertheless resisted, albeit after unheard-of effort. And I believe that this is due to a greater strength of my will that I gained

through a hard school. You know that I am from poor parents and that my life was by no means smooth. I had to struggle a great deal and endured privations of all kinds. The Baron, however, was able to let himself go. He had inherited a large fortune and still the available rest ensured him a comfortable life. His successes had not been difficult for him. I realized that I would not succeed in getting the Baron to work. He sat opposite me and followed my every move with wild eyes. And I knew that I had to be careful. But it was just this tension of all forces that came to my aid in the fight against the strangers and I rowed more easily than before.

Suddenly he pointed his hand in our direction of travel and said, "A ship."

I let myself be taken by surprise and turned my head half to the side. Then I felt a rocking of the boat and already his hand was at my throat. He had jumped up and was upon me. His impact had thrown me backwards. I was lying under him and with the swaying of the boat the sea water splashed on my face. I knew that if I couldn't shake him off, I was doomed. Slowly, I managed to gain a bit of an advantage. With the grips of Jiu-Jitsu, the art of Japanese wrestling, I forced him to release my neck, squeezing his arteries and finally grabbed his arm in such a way that I could have easily broken it if he had made one more move.

This grip, which causes terrible pain, brought him to his senses. He looked at me quite distraught and let go. Unfortunately, I will never be able to prove my assertion, but it is as true as the sun that at that moment I was looking into the face of a stranger. The Baron's face was completely changed, the person I had in my power there I did not know. He had become ugly, bleary-eyed, and his eyeballs were turned strangely inward. Now I was able to stand up and throw him completely off me, so that he tumbled over the oar bench. I lifted the oar high up and swung it over his head.

"If you do anything like that again, I'll bash your skull in." I roared.

My behavior was, after all, perhaps quite powerful and offered the only possibility for my salvation. But I wished I could also say how much I despised myself because of these brutalities, and how much I basically agreed with the Baron, how much I longed to turn back and acquire the deep peace that seemed in prospect for obeying that order. I acted completely against my better conviction when I took up the oars again and began to work. You have no idea of this deep cleavage in my nature. I stood

against myself. And for motives unknown to myself, that which finally won out, what I thought was my worse self, won over my better self.

The Baron was sitting in the back of the boat with his legs folded under him, like an Oriental, swaying his head back and forth and whimpering like an animal. But the ruse he had used earlier for his attack had become reality. A ship was coming over there, across our course. Feeling that it was time to end the struggle within me by abandoning myself to strangers, I hailed the ship. It was a fishing cutter from Capo d'Istria, which had spent the night out fishing and was now returning home. We were taken on board, and with my last ounce of strength, I begged the guide not to be diverted from his course under any circumstances. Then I saw how our boat was tied to the ship; I stumbled into a cabin and immediately fell into a terrible heavy sleep that was as deep as an abyss. When I awoke, it was late in the morning. I heard the sounds of the landing. The embarrassing uneasiness one feels when one has not fulfilled an important duty was still there. But at least I was already able to live with myself, so to speak. I was no longer quite so unbearable to myself as before.

Slowly and waveringly I came on deck. My first question was about Baron Latzmann. They looked at me in amazement, laughed, and turned away from me as if I were a madman. Did I not know that I myself had sent the Baron in the boat around the peninsula to Muggia? The Baron had been down and had received an urgent and important order from me that had to be carried out immediately. When I cried out that this was not true, the patron looked at me pityingly, shrugged his shoulders and left me standing there. I ran to the back, where the boat had been fastened. It was gone. The Baron had followed the order. You know he was never seen again. He remained disappeared. You know the rest of the events very well from the newspaper reports. I did not stay long in Capo d'Istria. On the third day after this adventure I found my own obituary next to that of Baron Latzmann in the newspapers. I must confess that I felt a little strange when I read my name in the obituary section. The legal authorities hoped to later track down the criminals through these obituaries.

But all the effort was in vain. The energetic conduct of the investigation was also delayed by the fact that in the meantime I was back at sea with our cruiser. As for me - well, I will not deny that I have been very ill. The state of disgust with myself lasted for a long time, even if in diminished strength, and sometimes relapses came that brought me down

very much. It was as if I had an insidious, creeping poison inside me. It was an infection of my mental powers, which also infected my body. I had to take a vacation. But now I am on the road to recovery, even if I am still a little weak ..."

Take Marinescu

Under the dragon lanterns of a Japanese festival I met Professor Gerngruber. It was in the garden of our envoy's country residence, a mouth-ripping colorful paper monster made googly eyes over the professor's head, spewed colors on his bald head, the gypsy music from the dance floor threw itself swirling into the night.

We bumped into each other and he said, "Pardon!"

I realized from this that he was a German, because I had stepped on his toes, and he said, "Pardon." By the way, it turned out later that he was of bearish strength; he had gone through all the sports schools, the ribs of his ribcage were of steel, his thighs like bulging car tires, and the books had by no means made him incapable of bashing the walls of one's stomach in with his fists. Nevertheless, he said "Pardon" when someone stepped on his toes. He could not be dissuaded from this; it was a hereditary defect. He was born in the Passau area. We later drank Pilsner together and a few glasses of champagne, got a slight friendship buzz, and poured out our souls to each other. It turned out that Professor Gerngruber was in Romania on a scientific assignment. His university had sent him to collect material for his great work on the Gypsy language. This work was to be the most thorough and scholarly ever written on the subject.

I later saw some thick books that Gerngruber called his sketchy preliminary works, and knowing that tediousness and incomprehensibility are undoubted signs of great erudition, after these rough drafts I dare to think only with awe of the planned monumental work. It goes without saying that Gerngruber used the latest methods for his research and that he was also equipped with gramophones and records to make phonographic recordings of the Gypsy idioms. It was at the time when it was part of the good manners of the Romanian society to be interested in harp playing. The harp played the same role at the Romanian court as the flute did at Sanssouci.

Since the Queen loved to sit in flowing robes at the harp and strum the silver strings, the imitating of Carmen Sylva was soon seen in every society down to the tea parties of the better bourgeois salons in Bucharest. Everywhere the chaste garment folds flowed along steeply stretched harp

bases, slender fingers quivered sobbing at the nerves and the purest nobility of soul swam ethereally sounding out to the stars. We were found in our champagne corner, and had to get out and listen to how Mrs. von M. disowned her known manly uninhibitedness through the music of the spheres.

Afterwards I said to Professor Gerngruber: "I saw what you were thinking about, forests and your gypsies."

"Yes!" he said in surprise, but it had not been so difficult to guess, for everything the professor thought played out in shadow and light on his face. Since we had shared joys and sorrows so comradely that evening, and we discovered, while discussing our next plans, that we both intended to roam the same area in the Romanian forested mountains, it was understood that we would form an alliance. Such alliances, based on two hours of champagne and a common escape from the sounds of harps, do not tend to last and have no particular meaning in life. The next morning, they are usually overshadowed by more important matters and only at chance encounters later, a confidential grin reminds one that one has once sworn something like eternal friendship to another.

Professor Gerngruber, however, was a man to detest such frivolities and also to consider oaths after midnight to be very serious. So in the next few days I had to take note of all the details of the equipment and arrange things myself for our future joint household in the wilderness; and I was not allowed to leave Bucharest until the day and hour of our meeting had been arranged in the most precise manner. Impelled by such a quick and undeservedly acquired attachment, a week later I was really on the appointed hour at the small train station in the middle of a wild mountain forest.

Professor Gerngruber leaned out of a carriage window of the train and joyfully shadow boxed with his hands, then he came rushing at me and pulled me into a bear hug. He looked very good, almost trapper-like, his high gaiters reminded one of good lederhosen, and if his strength had been matched by an equally wild disposition, he could have been expected to have those gaiters covered with fringes of human hair within a short time. Three men carried the scientific and personal luggage, two of them were assigned to the professor and me as servants, the third was Take Marinescu. Although he was actually hired in a higher capacity than that of a porter, he dragged more than either of the other two, he gasped with eagerness, his

zeal came into liquid appearance on his forehead as sweat, and all his strength seemed wasted in unconditional devotion to us and our tasks.

He was a handsome young fellow, of slender build, with a proper Roman profile. When he let this profile be seen, one truly had to think of those legionaries who had once put down the unruly Transylvanians and had been gradually transformed from soldiers into peasants. But if he turned his face full to one, then the Dacian emerged, the Scythe, Slav, and Hun cousin, with what I know of the racial characteristics of the eastern peoples; angular cheeks, sloping forehead, and lofty squinting slanted eyes.

We rode on a small, narrow-gauge forest railroad, where some bojare transposed champagne, theater, and silk petticoats into primeval forest, and meanwhile my friend lectured me on the division of labor and the order of our days. Hunting was assigned to me and research to him. Take Marinescu was a caretaker, an overseer, a confidant in intercourse with the local inhabitants, a factotum; a Bucharest university professor had recommended that he most urgently be taken along, this splendid fellow, who would certainly render us invaluable services. It was necessary to have an intermediary to overcome the shyness of the forest people who would not be easily accessible to a European.

From the end point of the forest railroad we rumbled another day on a farmer's cart over narrow forest paths. The settlement where we settled down for a permanent stay was like a cluster of filthy huts stuffed into the head of a valley, as if it had not been able to push the world of cleanliness and morality far enough away from itself. In these immense woods on the southern slopes of the Transylvanian Alps dwelt a degraded and squalid race, meagerly sustained by disgusting food and destitute in unspeakable poverty. It should be noted that these wooded areas south of the Hungarian border are among the most unknown areas in Europe.

The maps show the same white spots and the same helpless schematization and generalization of drawing as the maps of the Albanian mountains. For the rich gentlemen it is enough to know that trees grow there, one after another, one out of the other, primeval forests which one can cut down for a long time before they are completely devastated; and to know that one can have a hunting lodge there, where one can have a good time with friends and girlfriends for two weeks in the autumn. Then those forest people, who because of their laziness are useless even for logging work, do come into consideration as drivers.

This is what the professor told me during our ride on the jolting farm wagon, and three times he almost bit off his tongue. I was more than a little curious to see these primitive people, of whom I had formed an idea, which I later recognized as an advertisement of the copper skinned tribes in an old edition of Cook's World Travels. But it happened to me in reality with these pictures in such a way, as it always tends to happen to the imagined as regards to the original. Instead of a tribe of savages with leafy aprons or animal skins and shell necklaces, we found ourselves surrounded on arrival by a bunch of tattered men and women. They were just ragged and greasy, nothing more. Countless hands, like monkey hands, much lighter on the inside than the outside and just as wrinkled, were outstretched and begging.

I think the Gypsies of these forests must come out of the womb with this beggar's gesture, all reflexes, all impulses of the will flow into it, they fall asleep with it, and if they should be buried seemingly dead and wake up in the grave, then they must first stretch out their hand in begging. Of the entire culture, of the rich relations of human society among themselves, they possess nothing but this single, pathetic and shameful gesture.

For the rest, there was nothing to be noticed of shyness, their nature was rather an impudent curiosity, groping and reaching for everything, their behavior showed a kind of stupid arrogance, which was justified by nothing, except perhaps by an unsurpassable excess of dirt and mange.

Take Marinescu had less to do with bringing them in than with keeping them away, and he did this with all the vigor he could muster, smashing into the pile with his bullwhip, so that we thought there must be burst skulls and crushed bones. This was also the only language in which one could make oneself understood with the people, because Gerngruber's knowledge of the gypsy languages was not sufficient in this corner of the world, here one spoke a completely strange and most bizarre gibberish mixed from a thousand language scraps. One can imagine with what zeal a man went to work, whose life was dedicated to the exploration of this area. We had not even quite settled into our tents when he set out with notebook and gramophone to capture this gibberish as if it were one of the most flourishing revelations of the human spirit. How culturally alien our forest people were, we could judge from the fact that the gramophone seemed to be completely unknown to them. They knew nothing of this cultural toy, which can be heard buzzing in the tents of the Bedouin sheiks and in the snow huts of the Eskimo chiefs, but they were also too dull or too haughty

to be duly astonished by it or to fear it as a real primitive people would have done. When their own voices came to them from the funnel, they laughed into it and then listened as if they had called out into the forest and now expected to hear the echo.

Only the village elder, an old man with a patriarchal beard and a nose like a purple mandrake root, got angry once, felt ridiculed and spat grimly into the funnel. It was amazing, by the way, the speed with which Gerngruber found his way through the burps, stutters and tantrums of his gypsies. The pages of his notebooks were covered with entries, the record collection grew from day to day, and after two weeks he had already established the basic grammar and a quite respectable vocabulary. Now he could already communicate with people and try to penetrate deeper into their imaginations and feelings.

His method prescribed to him to inquire first about their concepts of God, but he soon convinced himself, as he sorrowfully assured me, that this question was evidently far too involved to be solved with his still limited knowledge.

"They have, at any rate, contrary to expectation, very subtle religious ideas," he reported. I asked the elder, "Are you a spirit?"

"Yes!" he says.

"Do you know where God dwells?", I asked further, not expecting him to tell me everywhere, because he is omnipresent, but to point toward heaven in a childlike manner. But he becomes anxious and restless, moves around, and doesn't want to say it. I urge him, promise him tobacco that makes his eyes shine, but still fear is the stronger; I hold a package of tobacco in front of his purple tuber, greed becomes the mistress of fear, he reaches for it and murmurs, "In the glass."

Immediately afterwards, however, he covers his arm over his eyes and crawls backwards with a quiet whine, like a dog that is afraid of being beaten. What is one to think of this? What religious ideas do these people have, who are Christians by name, but about whom neither the church nor the school cares, and whom even the state seems to have forgotten for its army?"

A few days later, this intricate concept of the God of the forest gypsies was to be elucidated to us. I had been hunting from the early morning and returned in the evening, very tired and all bruised from the march through jungle thickets, which with thorny tendrils had torn my clothing and

whipped my face. Gerngruber was sitting with some old men under an oak tree by a small fire. He had the gramophone beside him and the notebook in his hand. The men had roasted a hedgehog and shared it among themselves and were now answering, smacking and picking their teeth with the hedgehog's spines, the questions of my friend, which seemed to me to resemble a pump groaning and working hard to draw water from dried-up and recalcitrant wells.

He saw me approach, looked up in greeting, and said, "Oh, your face is all bloody!"

"It's possible," I said, "I’ve taken a good beating from the forest."

And I took out a small round pocket mirror, which showed me a bloody crack across the forehead and one on the cheek. At that moment something unexpected and strange happened. The men, who had just been sitting around the fire smacking and chewing comfortably, dropped the pieces of meat from their dirty claws and fell forward onto their faces with a quiet whimper.

Gerngruber looked at me in concern and shouted something to the men. The eldest, without raising his face from the ground, made fierce defensive movements with his right arm and burped out a few words excitedly.

"He says," translated the professor, "you should put away the mirror."

My mirror had the forest people on the ground. Superstitious fear of the glass that reflected our image had overwhelmed them and all at once it became clear that they knew no God but only an idol, the glass mirror, that these Christians in the forests of the Transylvanian Alp were fetish servants. I kept the mirror in my vest pocket, the professor informed them that the god had withdrawn, and now they rose slowly, with shy glances at me, still quite spellbound by the proximity of the supreme being of their neglected and wretched souls. No more conversation could be started, they remained distraught, and after a while they withdrew into their huts.

"You know," I said afterwards, as we discussed this new observation over a bottle of wine and tried to place it in the series of our knowledge of these people, "the mirror has always been an uncanny object to me. It mimics us, it brings forth a double, it turns us into a phantom, a ghost, we suddenly see ourselves outside of ourselves, a living image that is nevertheless only a face, an insubstantial reflection that slips out of the glass without a trace when we take a step to the side. This has for a long time actually horrified me at heart, and only habituation lets us endure this

gruesome doubling of our self. Well, since I now know that there are people, whose God dwells in the looking-glass, it is even more uncanny to me."

"It is perhaps a dark feeling from what you are saying," the professor said thoughtfully. "Forgive me, I am not joking: after all, the monkeys are very much astonished when they find their image in the mirror and there is nothing behind it when the glass is turned over. One step higher, and the fear of appearance sets in. Then mankind enters the light of culture and then the mirror is a thing about which you can read a whole lot of laws in optics. It has its rules and its place in the world and its appearances. One step higher and out of our nerves and our imagination grows again that old fear of primeval times, because we know very well that we can't really justify and explain anything with our explanations and our laws. With our gypsies it is the incomprehensibility of these creative forces of the glass which instills fear in them. Is there not indeed something divine in it, in which always, even in our religion of love, a residue of fear cannot be suppressed ... is it not, then, as I said, really like a creative act of the Deity, when out of the nothingness of the blank glass suddenly emerges a human image which was not there before? And is it not a counterpart to death and annihilation when it is wiped away again, when it perishes without a trace, as human life slips away from the mirror of the world? Is there not a deep philosophy in the madness of these people?”

One could see that the professor was inclined to endow his Gypsies and their objects of thought with a significance by which the study of their language must have become even more important to him. We spent that evening in long conversation on this subject, and the very next morning we were to be brought back to it. After breakfast the village elder came up, took his seat on the floor beside our table, and seemed in a sort of solemn mood. He was silent for some time, and as it was common for him to keep us silent company for a while, we paid no attention to him at first.

I stood up to fetch my rifle, and he suddenly began to speak. The formal manner of his otherwise impetuous colloquial speech made me curious; I saw astonishment on my companion's open face, which transformed through all moods to a most amused smile.

"You have no idea what he wants," the professor turned to me, "he demands nothing less than that we give him all the "God glasses" we have. What do you say to that?"

Apparently, this old gentleman is also the chief priest of his tribe and considers himself entitled to take all the mirrors he can get under his care."

I found the request a bit strong, said some things in very strong German, whereupon the old man, who did not understand the words, but the emotional content, seemed very embarrassed.

His wrinkles moved in confusion, his white beard began to tremble, and the purple bulbous growth above it visibly paled, as if the hand of fate had caught him by the nose. I paid no further attention to him, shouldered my rifle, whistled Belisar and went into the forest. When I came home in the evening, Gerngruber laughed at me.

"Think of it, the old man has been here again and once more demanded our mirrors; I think he fears for his high priestly reputation if anyone else besides him is in possession of God's glasses. Who knows how many pieces of glass he has already gathered, in which holy place he keeps them hidden, and what mischief they may serve. He became impertinent and I had to explicitly tell him off."

I was too exhausted that evening for another long mirror conversation. When one has walked ten hours through impassable mountain forests, the strangest peculiarities of fellow humanity leave one more indifferent than to a piece of cold meat and the woolen blanket in which to wrap oneself. My sleep was deep and black, without a trace of dream colorfulness. A shaking awoke me; it was morning, and the professor had his hand on my shoulder.

"Listen," he said, "my shaving mirror is gone. I want to shave and I can't find it. Have you perhaps nabbed it?"

How could I have nabbed the professor's mirror? I let my beard sprout in the juiciest primeval growth.

"Then it has been stolen! Do you still have your mirror?"

I reached into my vest, went through my pockets, found my watch, toothpick, compass and suitcase key, but I searched in vain for the small round mirror, it had gone away together with Gerngruber's shaving mirror, to the holy place of the God's glasses. We looked at each other.

"Take Marinescu," we said simultaneously.

I have not yet found the time to speak about this so highly recommended confidant, caretaker and supervisor of ours, because it seemed more important to me to first share a little of the customs and souls of the forest people among whom we lived, and because it seemed to me that at the same time I was also revealing a little of his nature by speaking

of that of these people.

One will, I hope, not entirely blame me when one learns the further course of our adventures. It was indeed the case with Take Marinescu that in the course of the weeks he had changed more and more from a compliant, attentive, overzealous fellow into a lazy, dissolute and dirty good for nothing. Was it because the professor, to whom I had given the supreme command, was all too good-natured to tighten the leash on this youngster and hang the breadbasket higher in time, or had his interactions with these degenerate people brought out the basic instincts of his nature despite his European education. — he had proved himself in nothing but loafing, had shown himself capable in nothing but gluttony, was reliable in nothing but lying.

We had long known that we were paying for a secret enemy in him, had long observed that we sometimes lost little things that we heard jingling in his pockets. When we sent him out to buy groceries in the next town, he cheated us most shamelessly. But each such shopping trip was a journey of four to five days and arduous, so we preferred to be cheated rather than leave the forest for so long.

He had put himself on the most familiar footing with the Gypsies; we knew that he gave them liberally of our provisions, partaking of their hedgehog meals, lizard roasts, and ant soups without shyness or discrimination in his insatiable gluttony. He had certainly developed that dark human primordial aspect, felt a comfortable kinship, and had learned the language of the forest almost as quickly as the professor. Our acquiescence had made him bolder and bolder, and so it came to pass that he had now, probably on behalf and for the benefit of his friends, stolen our mirrors over night. His name had come to the tongues of both of us at the same time, but no sooner had it been uttered than it struck the professor's German conscience and he began to rethink his position. We considered that our servants were harmless fellows, somewhat limited in spirit, but of an honesty commanded by unshakable deference. They were to be trusted with not grabbing our property; moreover, they were Bulgarians who had no linguistic community with our Gypsies. That it could not have been the old man or one of his village gang, however, followed from the fact that Belisar had not attacked. The dog used to lie between my sleeping bag and the professor's at the entrance to the tent and would certainly have attacked any suspiciously approaching stranger.

It really had to be Take Marinescu, and the professor told him so in the sternest tone he was capable of.. Although he was righteously annoyed that his shaving mirror, the most important piece of his personal belongings, had just slipped away from him, this tone of utmost severity was still buttery smooth, and Take Marinescu denied it all with an impudent grin, without getting particularly excited.

My blood was boiling, and I pushed the professor to one side and stepped on the plan. I don't remember what I said, but it must have been peppered with the professor's remonstrances, and my bullwhip must have swung a very clear beat to it in front of the fellow's face, because I still remember his eyes, how they lost their insolent gleam and instead fear and treachery crouched in them and began. The eyeballs were covered with fine red nets, the pupils were dark-rimmed, narrow, thin hoops stretched to the utmost around black blazing wells of hatred.

With that he finally irritated me so much that I soundly boxed him on the ear, I don't remember much. But it happened. Take Marinescu howled, crawled away and did not reappear for an entire day. But if we believed that we had intimidated him with this new robust method, it was to prove a mistake. The gypsies evidently believed that after the abduction of our god-glasses we were more defenseless and less to be feared than before.

A part of our strength had, in their opinion, been taken from us and passed over to them; with it grew their desires for other tempting things, and Take Marinescu was all the more willing to serve this covetousness, as he could thereby satiate his own revenge in a pleasant way. Almost no night passed without a loss, soon a piece of laundry was missing, soon an instrument, soon something of the food supply we had piled up in our tent to protect it to some extent after all. And the stolen things would sometimes reappear here and there, the professor would find one of his shirts on the body of the tall pockmarked Vitru, I fished for my brass compass among the withered dirty breasts of an eighty-year-old old woman.

They wore the glories stolen from us before our eyes without shyness, and they tolerated it without particular agitation when they were snatched from them again by force, for it was evidently part of their legal concepts that taking, one way or another, constituted ownership. Such fooling around with these degenerate people was, of course, shameful and degrading. If the village had been located somewhere in the interior of Africa, I would have considered myself justified in exercising punitive power and bringing us

peace through some exemplary chastisements. But we were in a state under the rule of law, and should we play police, or outrage the whole tribe would go against us and in the end God knows create what kind of diplomatic turmoil would be created. The professor said that if it were not so interesting here, he would vote for breaking down the tents.

He told me a long and drawn out story about the fabulously peculiar composition of the language of these people as an apology and encouragement to stay, and finally brought up Take Marinescu as a reason to stay longer, saying that now he was tired of it and he personally would chase him away.

"No," I said, "chasing him away is not enough. The fellow hides in the woods and yet continues his trade at night. He's a master thief. Do you ever notice when he steals from us? It's like he knows exactly when we've fallen asleep. How many times now have we already alternately took turns to stay awake, but for some reason a light sleep and confusion always comes over us. Belisar doesn't alert us, at most he wags his tail when he smells the lad. Once I think I kept an eye on the entrance to the tent all night. I think I can swear to you that not a wrinkle moved there, and in the morning my binoculars were gone. You know, he unties a tent line from the peg, reaches in, fishes something out, and then ties the line again. No, dear professor, we can't get rid of him any other way than by giving him a lesson to make him forget about coming back. Give me power of attorney, let me act hunter-like for once."

The professor reluctantly gave his consent, and all day I watched our valiant Take Marinescu walking, swaying his hips defiantly, lying under a tree smoking, and blinking insolently at us, and a pleasant foreboding of approaching satisfaction ran through my body. In the evening I made my preparations while the professor was still sitting by the fire. I did not want to shake his soft heart, to listen to any last-hour pleas. Night came, the fire sank down, above the gap in the forest at our heads the sky was embroidered with a thousand stars. We crawled into our sleeping bags without having spoken once again of my plan, the execution of which Gerngruber perhaps had not yet expected for this night.

I myself wanted to stay awake, at the risk of having given up a night in vain, because it was by no means certain that Take Marinescu would make another night visit just today. For a long time I fought bravely against sleep, on my watch I saw the luminous hands moving from one button to the

other, without anything happening that would have rewarded me for the burning of my eyes and the agonizing rearing and tearing away from the comfortable sinking into the flood of sleep. Already I believed that Take Marinescu had been warned by his animal instinct and would let this night pass just as any other that was more sharply guarded by us.

It had to have been towards morning, in the narrow crack of the tent entrance and over the back of the sleeping dog when suddenly the sky shown a gray gossamer, this inkling of light was there all at once, perhaps I had slept through its approach after all or it had just washed over the threshold of consciousness. At that moment, without having heard the slightest sound beforehand, I heard the sharp snap of the strong spring steel trap somewhere behind me. It went through me hotly, a hunter's delight went to my head, Take Marinescu was caught, we had him, and now he might flounder for a while, he deserved no better. He would call us for help, would ask us to help him.

He would have to make himself very small in front of us and promise to leave and never come back. It gave me cruel pleasure to imagine how he hung with his hand in the iron trap, how he clenched his teeth in order not to scream and how the pain would finally force the first groan from him. Now I was focused with all my inner and outer hearing on the results at the trap, but except for some slight noises, hardly louder than the flapping of the wings of stray birds against the tent wall, nothing could be heard. What superhuman willpower this fellow possessed to let the sharp striking iron grind his hand for so long without calling us. Finally, I was overcome by this expectation of a groan that was not forthcoming, and was completely aroused.

The longer the silence held out, the more it gained the upper hand over me, every minute more burdened my soul; was I still a European, or had I already become one of these savages, with the cruelty of a beast and the pleasure of tormenting human bodies? Hesitantly pale light ran into the tent, I could stand it no longer, and slid to the back of the tent on my knees, to the iron trap that had snapped shut around Take Marinescu's hand. I cried out. Between the strong, steel, serrated jaws of the iron was a single bloody crooked finger.

"What's up," the professor asked sleepily from his bed.

"Just look!" I said quivering, "I set my biggest steel traps, the ones with serated teeth for a secure hold ... they lock into place with a snap, you can

only open them with the key I have with me."

"Well, and?"

"Don't you see ... I put one on each tent bundle so that when the thief reaches in, he would get caught. Take Marinescu got caught ..."

Gerngruber scooted out of the sleeping bag with both feet.

"There you see, but he got loose. He left a finger behind; he cut it off, silently... he mutilated himself to remain free ... like an animal, like a fox or a rat."

The professor was standing next to me, in underpants with a red braid wrapped around his belly, and in socks, his bald head sitting over his skull like a tight-fitting helmet. I felt that he did not agree with me at all, not at all, and that the sight of this severed finger touched him in the most embarrassing way. Since I myself did not agree at all with the outcome of my first manhunt, I needed all the more someone who could have somehow helped me to understand more easily, so that I could have accused myself all the more vehemently. But since the professor did not do this, the whole burden of an apology was to be left to me. With annoyance I felt the whole story had become very much twisted, and felt a distinct resentment at my companion's lack of friendship and support.

Sullen and thoughtful, we set about burying the finger that had been left to us, and we did it like children burying a canary, making a coffin for it out of a tin cigarette box, in which it was carefully bedded on absorbent cotton. For the rest, we decided to keep quiet about the matter. Take Marinescu himself, of course, had disappeared. On the tent canvas we found some small traces of blood, on a flat stone near the stream a dark spot, otherwise the forest had swallowed our companion without a trace and we assumed that he had moved away from our vicinity.

The professor told the gypsies that we had chased him away on the spot after a violent escape. But it was obvious to me that they did not believe us. The fact, however, that he had by no means left our vicinity, but was still roaming around somewhere in the forest and was watching us, was to be indicated to us in a strange way after a few days. We stepped outside our tent one rainy morning and, after sticking our noses into the damp air; we looked for a dry patch of ground where we could set up our field chairs, when a dead field mouse lying on the edge of a pool of rain water caught my eye.

There were enough mice in the woods that year so that this little corpse

could by no means have been considered anything special if there had not been something else about it that was striking.

"You see, Professor!" said I, "there lies a dead mouse, and in its body are three pieces of wood."

It was really so, protruding from the gray velvet fur were three small pegs, sharpened at the bottom and top, one in the neck, one in the belly, and one in the hindquarters. The professor bent down to look more closely at the strangely rendered corpse, and when he straightened up again, he showed a, it seemed to me, most inappropriate seriousness.

"It's a message," he cleared his throat, "you know, a message in the sign language of the Gypsies. You know that the migrating tribes send each other messages by such signs about the way, the direction of the migration and everything worth knowing. What this sign means in particular, I do not know ... Meanwhile, we will ask François to come."

Now we both acted as if the matter did not concern us at all and left us completely unconcerned. I know, however, that it was the same with the professor as it was with me, namely that at the sight of this mysterious sign we both immediately thought of Take Marinescu and from that moment on we were no longer convinced that he had left the forest. François, the village chieftain and chief priest of the glass mirrors, who had come by his name God knows how, appeared and was led before the dead mouse. After a brief contemplation, he shook himself as if throwing something from his shoulders and then extended three splayed fingers of his left hand toward the impaled corpse. As he raised his face to us, I saw a false sadness on the surface, and underneath, barely veiled, a hearty gloating.

"It's like I said," the professor translated the expert report, "Someone is foretelling misfortune and disaster for us."

"Someone? Who? Take Marinescu!"

"François doesn't know that. The sign says nothing about it."

"Oh, don't believe everything people say. Can't you see that he's just trying to scare us? They are in cahoots with Take Marinescu. And by the way, he's gone, left the forest a long time ago, and is now stalking the Bucharest pavement again."

I realized that I had made contradictory statements with the last two opinions, got very angry and chased the old man away with a grim movement. Incidentally, I firmly resolved to believe that our enemy was no longer in our domain, and I managed to put together a number of reasons

why it really had to be like that and not otherwise. But my nerves refused to submit to my good reason and painted me all kinds of dangers threatening from behind bushes, trees and rocks in the forest during my hunting walks. It was really no pleasure to crawl through the jungle with the feeling that a rope could suddenly be thrown around your neck or that a sticking knife could suddenly drive into your neck.

After all ... reason or no reason ... it's not our head that makes our life pleasant or unpleasant, but our nerves that are our real masters; and if you look at it closely, if someone is able to get a finger caught in a safety trap and then able to cut it off without making a sound, he is probably capable of other things that are more dangerous to others than to him. Why should I deny it: under these circumstances, I would have been quite happy if the professor had said one day that he was finished and we could pack. And he may have felt the same way, but as it is wont to go, no one wanted to give the first word, and so at first my poor Belisar had to believe in the enemy in the woods.

One day I came back from the thicket, tired and hot-footed. A thunderstorm stood reared blue-black over the mountains, cloud bellies pushed over gray-green peaks. Birds chirped in thunderous tremors, my skin poured sweat in great drops. When we, me and Belisar, arrived at the spring from which we were getting our water needs, the dog, thirsty as he was, threw himself on the ground and began to drink greedily. We had discovered this spring, a quarter of an hour from our tents, and captured it for ourselves because we did not want to enjoy a water polluted by God knows how from the stream used by the gypsies.

This stream ran through a small swamp and past the huts, but here a clear and quite abundant stream sprang directly from the hillside through a short pipe into a pool. Belisar lay at its edge, both front paws spread wide as if to embrace the little water, and slurped greedily with a long, flinging tongue. I waited patiently until he had finished. He finally rose and shook himself so that the drops flew, waved his gratitude to me and trotted freshly ahead. I did not pay any further attention to him when he lagged behind, and it was not until I was about a hundred paces from the camp that I looked around for him. He came slowly behind me, creeping along with his tail and head down and his legs buckling strangely, as if his bones had suddenly softened. After five or six steps he kept stopping; I saw that he was trembling and his head dangled listlessly. My whistling did not make

him hurry in the least, and his deterioration was so obvious that I could not doubt that he had suddenly fallen seriously ill. I ran to him, and then he just collapsed, as if his spine had suddenly been crushed. His eyes were covered with a dull film, his lips retracted from his teeth, and when I tried to put my hand on his head, he suddenly snapped blindly at me. Immediately he also collapsed in front, rolled on his side, and his muscles were clenched and racked by terrible spasms, long waves ran all over his body. My poor Belisar was beyond help, I stood before the panting dying animal with a desolate jumble of thoughts in my head.

Suddenly a thought stabbed up glaringly, hitting me almost painfully in the center of consciousness. It threw me around and I ran frantically for our campsite. There the two servants worked at the fire, in the blackened kettle our meat bubbled, in the smaller blue pot the tea water boiled. I heard two screams, a wild hiss, smoke billowed and scorched my face hotly.

"How dare you?" the professor roared. "Are you insane."

With two savage kicks I had hurled the kettle of meat and the teapot into the fire, the two servants were kneeling by the ruined embers where the pieces of meat were spluttering, looking up at me with the expression of people who are to be beheaded in the next moment.

The professor held me by the arm and kept yelling, "Yes, what's wrong?"

"Belisar just died!" I said at last through a narrow slit in my throat.

Gerngruber didn't grasp the context, his eyebrows raised to high arcs above his circular eyes.

"Belisar drank from the spring. He poisoned our spring."

— It proved that I was right; we found the soil above the spring pipe churned up and interspersed with a yellowish powder under a covering layer of moss, and in the pipe itself a small yellow ball in a little bag. The water, which was intended for our consumption, flushed through the poisoned soil and through a pipe in which death had been planted. In the evening of that day, the professor said that it was really enough and that we would do well to retreat. He was almost finished with his work and, if we still wanted to study the cave gypsies, nothing would stand in the way of our departure.

The cave gypsies were, of course, the strangest of the world-lost people here in the Romanian mountain forest, and no distress, no matter how great, could keep us from seeing and hearing them. We accelerated our

preparations for what would be a three-day excursion into the unknown, providing ourselves with food, weapons and instruments.

From the black box we took out a sufficient number of records and then we set off with one of the servants carrying the backpack and gramophone, while the other stayed at home as the guardian of the camp. Desert mountain streams beat foam against steep cliffs, the bridges consisted of two trees dropped side by side and went railless over deep chasms. A labyrinth of yellow-gray sandstone walls surrounded us with the grotesque shapes of an enchanted city. On the crest of a mountain range we walked carefully over a swaying high moor, which once swallowed our servant up to the knees. On the second day, before us stretched a hundred meter high clay wall that seemed smoothly cut off as if by a giant's spade.

Only when approaching it, one saw the time wrinkles, which the flowing water had dug into it and the human mouse holes at the foot of the monstrous waste. A piece of the primeval world dwelled there in the mountain, the dirtiest, most puny early world of humanity, one thought one was visiting one's ancestors, on the ape's border, as far as the darkness, wetness and dirt of the dwellings were concerned. In this widely ramified tangle of caves, it smelled unspeakable, as if one was crawling around in the decaying entrails of a gigantic beast. It was all so far from the present, so stone-age and grim-faced, as if the primordial ground of history were shimmering through.

It was astonishing that a quite respectable breed of people could thrive here, prettier than their relatives in the surrounding forest villages, slender and sinewy men and above all women, who up to their twentieth or twenty-second year had a strangely provocative beauty of their own. Egyptian and Roman seemed mixed in it, the delicate quivering nostrils of Queen Nepto and the forehead, chin and shoulders of the so-called Sabina in the Roman National Museum. Despite having grown up directly out of the filth, these girls somehow gave the impression of grace and purity, and only when they were past their first youth did they fall into the natural law of their origin and environment, and soon wilting, worn out women became sticky, dirt-starved hags.

Under our gaze they squirmed complacently and vainly, let us see the nakedness of their supple, metallic shining bodies between their rags of clothes, crowded together, giggled and seemed to expect something from us. We were soon to learn what the girls thought they could get from us.

Gerngruber had been working with his notebook for an hour and now invited the whole company into the most spacious cave, the state room or underground marketplace of this mole village.

Half a hundred people went into the room, bodies and heads crammed into the mouths of the galleries. Three or four pine chips burned on the walls; as in the troglodyte caves of Auvergne, crude red chalk drawings of animals and people could be seen on the smoothly painted hard clay of the ceiling. Just across from us, in the center of the gathering, a group of about twenty young girls had gathered, bumping into each other, laughing, swaying their bodies back and forth like large flowers. The men paused in an Indian-like seriousness, the old women chattering all the louder, as if they had a special entitlement to lead the discussion. All necks craned as our servant took the gramophone from its wrapping and straightened it out. It was part of the professor's method.

He always showed his gramophone candidates a few records first, from which fairy tales, legends, and poems of their own or a related language buzzed towards them, in order to then make it easier for them to understand what he was interested in. Experience had shown him that he always found what he needed more quickly in a meeting than if he had to search for the storytellers and singers by asking them individually. But this time, before the professor could explain what he wanted, one of the old women, who seemed unable to wait, jumped forward and pulled one of the young girls by the arm in front of the bell of the gramophone. And without any fuss, the slender thing began to shed her rags of clothes, and revealed herself before the eyes of the whole village and ours.

The professor seemed to have lost his speech, and he turned to me in the most acute embarrassment, but what could I say to him, who did not understand a word of this gypsy language. I shrugged my shoulders and did not know whether to keep my eyes on the beautiful body before me or to cast them down. The professor, meanwhile, had composed himself enough to wrestle with the old woman in question and answer. They cackled and burped, other women interfered, a chorus soon fought against the single voice of my companion, shouted him down, and one of them saw that they were getting further and further apart in their opinions.

Dripping with sweat, the professor turned to me after a quarter of an hour of fierce skirmish, while I waited for clarification with extreme tension and impatience.

"Do you think," he cried excitedly, ... "would you think it possible, it is outrageous ..."

"What?"

"They have taken us for ... no: wait. I asked why the girl has disrobed.

"You must take a picture of her," says the old woman.

"What do I need to take a picture for?", I say, "I just want to capture your voices, your fairy tales, stories and songs, I'll take them to Germany to make a book about them."

"So you don't want to buy girls?" she asks ...

"Buy girls!!!"

"Yes, my dear ... they think we are white slavers. Understand. Almost every year, white slavers come here, to this wilderness, to this desert untouched by culture, to buy fresh goods, for the Bucharest market, for export, I don't know, and now the women are indignant because they were mistaken about us."

They were really disappointed, apparently deeply hurt in the most sacred feelings, and angry chatter swelled louder and louder; only the men remained rigid with an Indian-like calm, because according to tribal custom this trade seemed to belong exclusively to the women’s affairs. The young girl in front of the gramophone hopper, with a derisive shrug of her shoulders, put her filthy rag of a dress back on.

Her mother continued to rage indomitably in front of the professor's face for a long time. It was difficult to carry out our learned intentions, and the professor had to talk a lot and spend many times the usual amount of money to get a few poor speech samples on his records. When we stepped out of the tangle of caves back into the forest, it was really as if we were diving out of the primordial depths of time into the present. I was about to say something immensely socio-political when I felt my hand grasped and, turning, saw the narrow face of the girl at my shoulder, who had undressed in front of the gramophone. Her nose drew in the air tremblingly, her lips were soft and wonderfully curved, and she said something that sounded more beautiful than anything I had ever heard in the Gypsy language.

"She says," the professor explained, "she wants to read your palm."

From her hand a warm stream passed into mine, very gently she unbent my curved fingers and turned the inner surface upward. Then she looked seriously at the characters of the skin for a long time, and in the meantime I looked with a kind of emotion at that sweetly inclined head, and how a

white furrow was drawn through the black hair. Then, without raising her head, she murmured some dark words. My gaze asked the professor.

"Hm!" he said evasively, "She predicts something unpleasant for you, of course, as was to be expected ..."

"Just say ..."

"Oh, silly things ... sickness and death!"

I already felt the smile of superiority on my lips, when suddenly the girl spat vigorously into my palm, screeched viciously, and ran with a guffaw into the nearest mud hole. There I stood, saliva running down my fingers, and we both, in our erudition and honesty, felt as if we were marooned on a desert island. — Whether it was an after-feeling of our defeat at the cavemen or a foreboding of future surprises, we returned from our excursion quite meekly and actually both of us expected to find some mischief. Exhaling, we found that our tents were in the old place, and with satisfaction we heard from the servant who had stayed behind that nothing remarkable had happened during our absence.

So we should have been quite reassured, but still we did not have that feeling of home that we usually felt so clearly in our spacious tent. It was as if some hostile and disturbing spirit had moved in here, as if something lay in wait with fixed, evil eyes, and I really took it with gratitude when the professor said that now we were finished and that we could go home.

"Let's break camp tomorrow!"

The professor unpacked his plates, I was, in an ambitious effort to bribe fate by being useful, helping him with it. We talked of primitive peoples, slavery, white slavery, the racial mystery of the beautiful people in the clay caves. My palm secretly burned, as if there had been a slight corrosive poison in the girl's saliva.

"You know," said the professor, "I've had enough of the woods. I long for my bookshelves and my desk and wet street pavement with the broad lights of shop windows on it. Such primitiveness is no longer for us, we are much too involved in the essence of a culture measured equally for all ... Would you please put these plates in the black box."

"I would be glad to," I said, while bending down with the plates to the box in the shade of the tent corner, "I can appreciate a person like Take Marinescu somewhat aesthetically, well, understood aesthetically. But basically, such appearances are, after all, uncomfortable and unbalanced ..."

I opened the lid and, without looking, put the new plates on the rack

with the others.

"Our energies ..."

A cool touch on my fingers, a sharp hiss, as of wind blowing through a narrow crack,

then a sharp pain ... I jerked my hand back, and from it dangled a moist black viper’s body, a triangular scaled head with its teeth buried in my flesh. The professor screamed, and rushed at me, I don't know where he suddenly got the pincers with which he grabbed the snake's head. Then he dipped my hand in his, cut and burned, and poured me some cognac, I saw the tent caught in a whirlwind and spun in circles, and in the center of this merry-go-round was a shapeless swollen hand ... Very soon I lost consciousness.

The next morning I woke up from heavy intoxication, but the professor had saved me with singeing, burning, cutting and cognac, because otherwise I would have been dead by this time. Three of the dangerous black vipers had been put in the plate box, but the biting beasts were also found in my hunting bag, in the photographic apparatus and even in the thermos bottle, and the professor had spent half the night hunting snakes with the servants. He destroyed one brood in each of the foot ends of our sleeping bags. The prophetic girl was to be right only with the first part of her prophecy, and also the illness was not of too long a duration. After ten days I was so far along, that, with no other consequences than a hole in my right hand, a lameness of the fourth and fifth fingers and a certain weakness, from having overcome the poison.

We started the way back without any delay. A day of wagon rattling brought me down again a bit, and also the ride on the wooden train through the autumnally colored forest made me freeze quite embarrassingly in the open box. I was glad when we reached the train station and the taking possession of a cozy express train car with soft seats was imminent. While the professor at the counter was sorting out the tickets and luggage, I was looking back into the humped forest world. The yellow, red and brown of the forests ran down from the slopes, and better than in summer one saw the folds of the lonely valleys. On a patch of blue sky streaked with white clouds soared a distant bird. So vivid was the memory of all I had been through that when Take Marinescu suddenly stood before me, I thought he was a creature of my thoughts.

"Good afternoon!" he said with a grin.

"You ... it's you. What do you want?"

He scuffed his left foot back and lifted his hat, "The gentlemen are leaving. I'm going back to Bucharest also."

"Go to the devil!" I said, furious that I knew no means of dealing with this impertinence.

"Oh yes!" he laughed, "but I still have to collect my wages. The gentlemen didn't fire me and so I still get wages for ... wait ... five weeks and three days, that makes ..."

He raised his hand and began to calculate for me how much he would still have to get from us, calculating on nine fingers and that stump whose complement had been buried by us out in the woods.

"What ... you ran away from us, you scoundrel," I fumed, pointing to the stump, "ran away from us and still demand wages after all that? Think of the spring and think of the snakes! Oh ... that there is no police, I would hand you over to the police at once ... but I will call the stationmaster and he'll have to lock you in the boiler house until a policeman comes..."

"What? ... what? ... Lord! What police?"

And he stretched his chest and stepped up brutally and defiantly almost on my toes. His breath washed around my mouth, his pupils rimmed with an iris hoop stretched to bursting. Fortunately, the professor had just approached, otherwise I would have probably, despite my weakness gone a round with Take Marinescu. Gerngruber wrapped me in his bear arms like a child and just set me to the side.

"What do you want?" he asked Take Marinescu in a gruff tone. Much more meekly in front of the professor's erect figure, but with tenacious insolence Take Marinescu presented his demand.

"No," cried Gerngruber, "no...no!" he repeated more weakly.

Immediately the lad realized his advantage and raised a clamor as if he had been seriously wronged. A ring of men formed around us, all woodsmen who had come out for payday. They had been drinking profusely and were waiting for their turn. They are silent when they are sober, these men, and they carry the heaviest loads submissively, but when they have become dangerous through liquor, then it can happen that they suddenly remember that the masters are also only made of clay and also only have a life like them.

Take Marinescu shouted and the men pulled the ring tighter around us, because here obviously one of their own had been wronged by the masters.

"They want to run away, with my wages," the fellow shouted, throwing his arms in the air, "just drive away. After serving them for so long ... are they gentlemen? Brothers, I live by my hands' work ... they are rich lords. They want to get even richer by stealing my wages."

I almost felt the men around us coalesce in hostility, become a wall, from behind I felt pushed, they pressed me against Take Marinescu. The professor could have made a breach with his bear strength, but he dropped his arms and considered apparently whether a few smashed ribs could be justified.

"Break it up! What is going on there!" someone shouted.

The stationmaster brought us relief and immediately the circle of men became a little wider.

"This person ... this murderer ...", I began trembling with rage.

"No, ... no," the professor defended, "do we have proof? We have no proof ..."

"Yes, what is it?"

"They need to give me my wages!" cried Take Marinescu glaringly, and the woodworkers murmured an echo.

"He demands his wages ... but he just abandoned us," I said.

"You see, that's so ...," the professor began apprehensively. A signal arm in front of the station, visible to me between Gerngruber's head and Take Marinescu's, went up with a clatter.

"The express train is coming! Make way!" the exclamatory voice drowned out the noise of our tangle.

In one leap the stationmaster had sprung toward the professor, grabbed him by the collar of his shirt, and dragged him off the tracks. We all rolled sideways.

"Don't let him get on!" howled Take Marinescu.

"Don't let them get on!" howled the workers, blocking our path to the rails.

"They shall pay! Make them pay!"

"My God, what can I do?" the station manager cried tearfully. "Let me go ... I have to get to the train ... it's best if you pay. What can I do?”

Black, with a wild air of distance and danger, the fast train rushed in. The workers furthest out staggered a little.

"Don't let them get on!" With legs spread and fists clenched, Take Marinescu stood before us. He had seized control, he was in command of

the moment, and there was no getting around him. For a few seconds the professor hesitated; already the conductor slammed the doors again, someone whistled. Then the professor pulled out his wallet, let a banknote flutter, Take Marinescu stooped down ... We rushed to the train, dealt a few fist bumps ... Five minutes later we had caught our breath, and just as we were crossing the gorge on the big iron bridge, we began to feel ashamed.

"Up to now it was just an interesting adventure," said the professor, "but today Take Marinescu really proved his efficiency."

I looked out at the colorful woods that rose to the Hungarian border. "Yes — I think we

still have a lot to learn ... before we get over this blow."

The Bloodletting Man

The shards of glass with which the gravedigger's caution had peppered the churchyard wall crunched under nailed shoe soles. Three fellows climbed up ladder rungs out of the shadows and danced in the moonlight, which threw green sparks into the bottle shards. Then one of them reached backwards and helped a powdered wig over the edge of the wall. Under the wig, the highly honored and respectable Doctor Eusebius Hofmayer puffed on the crunching battlements. He had pulled wide-legged riding boots over breeches and silk stockings and buckled shoes, in whose tubes thin thighs gave way. Now he swayed in the arms of a black fellow whose tread was as sure up here as on country roads, and whose blood knew nothing of swaying.

The other two jumped from the edge of the wall into the bramble bushes so that the vines flapped around and grabbed the enemy's pants with a hundred hooks. The third came slowly with him, sighing over the doctor's despondency, down the safe path of the ladder, which now led into the hill country of death. The black roof of the gravedigger’s cottage crept out of the low copse of crosses into the eloquent night, and the steeple of the little church pointed straight toward a silver cloud as if to spear it. In front of the gravedigger's door, a red flame brooded over a small pewter votive font, a double protection against ghosts and spirits, and the eternal light cast the shadows of the men on burial mounds, where they were broken up by the undergrowth.

Eusebius Hofmayer stumbled in the midst of his companions, who now once more went through the darkness with the sure tread of predators. From the rows of ancient gravestones they came to younger lands of death, and at last they searched among the hills of recent days, whose softness betrayed the toils of yesterday.

"This must be it," said the doctor, brushing his riding boot against an obstacle. The three others, however, had better discretion and pulled him a little farther into the darkness beneath the heavy branches of the ancient trees of life. A spark sprang from steel and stone and grew into the glow of a small lantern. The doctor cursed the glaring clang of spades and shovels as they huddled together as if in fear of the night and their handiwork. Now the work of the three fellows began as they gasped and threw the mound

apart.

"Was a good girl, that Veronika Huber," grumbled one, kicking the spade hard into the soft ground.

"A respectable and decent maiden."

"The groom wants to go to war. His mother is crying, but he is so full of pain that he has had enough of life."

The doctor's silver snuff box rattled loudly, as if the lid were to be used to knock down the lads' voices. Eusebius Hofmayer was impatient, because the work to reach the bottom of the grave was going too slowly for him. Unwillingly the trees murmured all around, and shadows fluttered from their tops, like black birds whose wings want to extinguish the light. Somewhere there was a lost moonlight, a daring glimmer through tenacious banks of cloud, just strong enough to fill the gloom with forebodings that stared like masks. In the middle of the empty heavens, above the spire, stood a dainty ark, receiving its silver from the moon hidden in the west. The Doctor was distracted by that cloud and thought of the Spanish galleys that had gone down with monstrous cargoes of silver somewhere on the sea. Then he sank back down to the business of that night. The fellows were talking and not getting anywhere.

"Why, my dears, why the delay! What a waste of precious minutes! *Mon dieu*. Do you want us all to get caught, Michel! Don’t just stand there and spit into your hands so often. If I had hired three moles for this affair, I would undoubtedly be further along than with your slowness. That's really something ..."

"*Ennuyant*![1]" said someone who stood next to Eusebius Hofmayer, looking like a gentleman in a house robe. A cold snake crawled across the doctor's back and wrapped its coils around his neck, while the shafts of his riding boots flapped against his thin thighs. The tools fell from the dirty hands of the three fellows. The strange gentleman, however, smiled kindly so that two rows of pointed teeth showed like saws between the puckered lips.

"Please do not be disturbed — *mon cher*. I am glad to see that you, too, are interested in fresh graves, and I am, how shall I say ....am unselfish enough to wish you the best of success."

"You are very kind," said the doctor, unable to take his eyes off the strange gentleman's back, from which two pointed, jagged shadows fell, as if wings were perched there at his shoulders.

"The immortalized maiden Veronika Huberin certainly has her own special qualities. But I do not begrudge her to you; truly I do not begrudge her to you. Science, my lord, science! It deserves every support. And the short-sightedness of the authorities is the greatest obstacle to a serious pursuit of anatomy."

"You are too kind. So you're in the trade, too?"

"In a way ... In a way! Not quite, but in a way."

Under the house robe, clockwork whirred, and the gentleman showed both his bright saws. And over the strange laughter his words stumbled on:

"In a way ... In a way. But the authorities protect decomposition, my lord. They place the corpses in coffins and forbid science to molest them. Decomposition, yes, decomposition is protected by the authorities. But I don't want to compete with you, sir. You shall have the immortalized maiden Veronika Huber."

"Very kind, very kind. Thank you. But may I ask what ...”

A hand raised against the doctor. Five black claws curled against the bold mouth.

"No, my dear, you must not ask. Or you shall not ask. I know it is the custom of serious science to ask everywhere. But this custom must be silent in churchyards. You see, I do not ask."

The moon had overcome the cloud banks, breaking through them near the horizon. The night became paler and the silver galleon above the church tower floated in a terribly empty green sky, as if it stood still, despairing of direction and destination. Between the trees of life glowed the bald skull of the strange gentleman, on which jagged seams drew the boundary lines of the bones; a wreath of yellowed hair like a frizz showed between the neck and the collar of the robe. The two gentlemen looked at each other.

Doctor Eusebius Hofmayer's teeth wobbled in his mouth when he saw the other's saws glinting, and he noted with amazement that between these saws and the two eye-holes, in which there seemed to be no sight, sat the upturned nose of a bat. A gesture from the strange gentleman seemed to invite the continuation of the work. The three fellows reached for the spades, but rusty clockwork creaked under the robe.

"No, my dear, your method is really *ennuyant*. It would be a bit tedious. I want to show you how I deal with this. But you must promise me in advance not to withhold compensation for my trouble."

The doctor noticed with pleasure that his consciousness had returned

from afar and that his breath swept panting once more through empty caverns. Everything dissolved into the comprehensible: this was a miserable swindler who wanted to be paid for his silence, a man who knew how to turn a coincidence into money. His question, about the terms of payment, was forestalled by the gentleman in the house robe.

"No, no. Roman law applies in the Holy Roman Empire. I trust that your consideration of legality will not deny my performance. We will make an anonymous contract, and you shall see that the advantage is yours. Now, then, the performance."

Out of the robe came two hands, and ten black claws thrust themselves against the grave, like magnetic iron rods against dead masses to which they wish to give life, and it seemed as if the earth moved under the wonders of a strange attraction. The clods flowed and lifted in their shaft, the earth crawled up at the edges with the bubbling of a boiling liquid and threw up bubbles that expanded, swelled, and pushed over the edges. The entire mass came alive, threw the three fellows out of the hole, reared up, and billowed out of its container as if under the pressure of gases, arched into a mound, and then burst with the bang of an explosion. The grave was free and at its bottom, under a tangle of crushed wreaths and flowers, lay the coffin of the immortalized young woman Veronika Huberin.

Then the three fellows threw down their tools, ran screaming into the bushes and left their earnings in the maw of horror. The doctor thought to run after them. His tongue was suddenly sticky and heavy and could not utter the words. He tormented himself with the question, "And the quid pro quo ..."

"You shall not ask, *mon cher*. We'll talk about that in your studio. Go home quietly now. You will find me and the immortalized maid Huberin there. Go!"

A polite bow and the gesture of a hand forced the doctor out from under the trees of life. The strange gentleman in a house robe walked beside him between graves. Jagged shadows rattled at his back and on the now lighted paths the tassels of the robe trailed like traces of blood. A sudden aloneness tore the doctor's fear with an even greater horror. The gentleman in the robe was gone. And to the side stood an old tombstone in the moonlight, tall and narrow and emphatic with words of terror, because in the cruel brightness it called out the name of one long dead, the Chevalier de Saint Simon.... The doctor began to run in his heavy riding boots, let

himself be whipped by branches, torn by broken glass and overcame the obstacles as if in a heavy dream.

In front of his house, he reflected. The long, narrow alley with its high gables concealed a threat in its wrinkled darkness. Between the shadows of the gables, the light of the sinking moon ate deep into the sleepy faces of the houses. On a cornice, a flock of stone birds fluttered among the tangled tendrils of an adventure carved in stone, and next to it, over the study window, was carved a person with a butter churn, driving the pestle vigorously into the tub. The erudition that had filled this house through a series of owners down to Doctor Eusebius Hofmayer still masked itself against the street by the somewhat joking humor of the builder, who had been inclined to everything strange. The doctor raised his head, birdlike, crookedly looked to the windows. It was quiet under the butter churn, and the moonlight trickled over the lifeless circular panes. Now the key hesitated at the boar-hunt carved front door and then found a well-hidden lock.

More confident and becoming less fearful, the doctor climbed to his study, and when he entered it, — he saw on the dissecting table the naked corpse of the immortalized maiden Veronika Huberin and in his private chair, the hard, black claws laid over the armrests, the bald skull bent back, marked by bone sutures, was the gentleman in his house robe. In one corner the floorboards huddled in darkness. The moon was preparing to leave the room.

"Welcome home," said the gentleman in his robe from his arm-chair, as if he were the master of the house, and the doctor could not help but stammer, "Welcome!"

"So, my dear friend, you may now ask whatever you like."

"So I ask, how did you get in here?"

"I know this house better than you, because I have known it a little longer and therefore I know ways that are not known to you. I expect another question."

The moon crept out of the room at the upper edge of the window, but the parlor remained in a pale light that seemed to radiate from the virgin Huberin on the dissecting table like a kind of phosphorescence in which the colorful flowers of the Turkish robe began to bloom colorfully. The strange gentleman took one of them out of the fabric, smelled it and put it back in its place. He waited for a question, which did not venture forth. It was so

quiet that one could hear the butter churner outside poking the pestle into the tub and the stone birds chirping next door. Damp boards creaked in the dark corner.

The question ducked under a mountain of fear, until the strange gentleman rose and stepped to the virgin Huberin with his colorful blooming robe, whose tassels left traces of blood on the floor. He took hold of her flesh and tightened the skin:

"You see, colleague, she is good and useful *for experimentis, demonstrationibus* and *studiis*[2]. Your specialization in the science of the kidney and gall bladder will make considerable progress. My delivery is not to be faulted; it was neatly and promptly executed."

"And my quid pro quo? ..."

The gentleman in the house robe rushed his answer over the echo of the question:

"It's simple and easy, almost ridiculous compared to my work. All I want is for my colleague not to bother to go to the cloister tomorrow and leave it to me to bleed the sisters.

"How can that be?" Is the gentleman a doctor? And does he then know how to handle the lancet so that just enough blood is drawn as is conducive to the preservation of the sisters' well-being and piety."

"You may rest assured that I will not disgrace your erudition, and that I will conduct myself like a man of science and not like a cranker."

"Is the gentleman a doctor?"

"At the very least, something similar. And as for bloodletting and drawing blood, I have as much practice as anyone in these delicate subjects."

The doctor's deliberation staggered between two resolutions. The naked corpse of the immortalized Huberin showed in its own light all the qualities estimable at the dissecting table, and the doctor jerked toward the instrument case to further court the answers to those burning questions that had thoroughly filled his last years.

"But-but. The impossibility, Mr ... Mr. ... is too obvious. If I put all my trust in you, if I consider your knowledge to be sufficiently well-founded, if I believe that my colleague will perform these small, health-promoting operations smoothly and without difficulty, I have no doubt that the ladies of the monastery will reject an unknown man with protest. I am the chosen physician, confirmed by the authorities, to whom the monthly bloodletting

has been entrusted and the only one of all the male individuals to whom admission to the monastery has been granted. I do not see how the gentleman colleague could penetrate the gates of this virgin castle and, if already penetrated, how he could enforce his intention."

"The difficulties, *mon cher*, are entirely and solely with you and the sluggishness in the flow of your thinking."

A black claw rose with a lecturing finger in a strange gesture of instruction, here at the dissecting table, on which the naked corpse of the maiden Veronica phosphoresced. The doctor adhered to this gesture of disputation and was about to answer with the same gesture, which was supposed to be a warm up for the impeccable exchange of a debate, when the strange gentleman cut off all germinating objections.

"You can't "imagine" this, can you, my dearest. You consider it impossible and you want to say: That it can’t be done. That is why I want to show it to you now. I ask you to please look at me a little more closely."

Cases are very difficult to prove when faced with such a monstrous absurdity, the doctor thought, forcing himself to go along with it. He was alone in his studio, in a terrible solitude, all the more terrible because he had to share it with a second self. Doctor Eusebius Hofmayer faced himself, doubled by the sudden fantastic inspiration of a creative power, and differed from the other Doctor Eusebius Hofmayer only in that he trembled while the latter smiled, that he wore two limp riding boots under his arms, while the latter held the silver button of a cane to his chin.

"I believe," said Eusebius Hofmayer the Second, "that the sisters will not deny me entrance in this appearance, unless they have decided not to admit the doctor, who has been elected and confirmed by the authorities, to the monastery at all, which would probably contradict all custom and also their own needs."

The complete perplexity of Hofmayer the First was poorly hidden behind a flat murmur. Down to the snug belly of the period and the somewhat snuff-stained laces of the fore shirt, down to the breeches, buckled shoes and fleshlessness of the calves, down to the wart above the left brow and the mole on the cheek below, went this wicked duplicity that threatened the doctor's well-anchored sanity. The pleasure of rising above it in dialectical exploitation was cut off by this cruelly similar reflection, as if it knew when the doctor had collected himself enough to find his way back to his stock of words.

"You now consider me similar enough, with your kind permission, to take up your position in the monastery tomorrow - well, to take up your position, I dare to add in all modesty - and give with *plenarn potestatem*[3], authority to exercise your office with the sisters. If you should hesitate, then you only need to recall in your memory that you have taken on the obligation to pay in return at the same time as accepting the benefit according to valid law and that you will hardly be able to avoid the recognition of this obligation."

Doctor Eusebius Hofmayer the First was too blunt to look for ways out, and gave Doctor Eusebius Hofmayer the Second all the powers he could want.

"Your handshake, Herr Colleague," demanded the second.

The first thrust out a trembling hand, but before the second could strike, something most unexpected happened. The immortalized maid Huberin sat up on the dissecting table, let her legs slide off the edge, and while making the gesture of shame with one hand, raised the other stiff arm in warning. The soundless movements triggered a spray of slavering anger in Hofmayer the Second:

"Lie down, virgin nosey, and don't get involved in things that don't concern you. I forbid myself such impertinence; you will soon enough get your turn."

The outburst was followed by a grumble: "Riffraff! And the form still demands: *de mortuis nil nisi bene*[4]. - Lie down!" he shouted once more and poked the corpse between the breasts with the head of his cane so that it fell down and regained its rigidity. Doctor Hofmayer the First struck the held-out hand of the Second; he would now have held his hand in red-hot iron without thinking.

A laugh burst in the room, like a meteor in dread darkness, and a silence followed in which one could hear the rumbling of the butter churn: Eusebius Hofmayer the Second had disappeared, as if the laughter had torn him to dust and the silence had engulfed him in its dark vortex.

Between Adam and Eve at the gate of the monastery, the peephole of the gatekeeper opened for the third time that morning. In the round cutout sat the lame shoemaker and showed the alley how hard he worked, the baker enjoyed the break between the early morning and afternoon baking in which he, from the steps of his front door above the pavement — profoundly and deeply worked his nose with thumb and forefinger, the

butcher's dog lay with outstretched paws right in the middle of the way and did not move when the traffic of this quiet street passed over him. Adam and Eve, the progenitors, were placed on both sides of the monastery gate by a simple belief and a childlike faith, and this gate led into the home of the convent women. Adam and Eve stood erect, undistinguished in their bodies, except for the most obvious features, under the trees of a petrified paradise, whose foliage united and entwined above the gate until leaves, fruits, and the animals of this confusion appeared like hieroglyphics, letters of a simple and unbiased text. Here was to be read the innocence of pleasure, the confidence of godliness, and of comfort, which had been common to the builder, the master builder and the sculptor of this old patrician building.

Sister Ursula said to Sister Barbara, who filled the corridor behind her, "He still hasn’t come. Once you are used to punctuality, this lateness is unforgivable ..."

"Yes, yes," gasped Sister Barbara and tried to turn around in the narrow hallway, but got stuck helplessly after a half turn. Her calm soul had, in time, expanded the temple of the body to three times its normal size and came to terms, gasping, with the minor inconveniences of being immense. She had preferred to close herself off with thick walls against the uncomfortably moving world and lay between the tremendous cushions of her fat like an asthmatic lap-dog. Sister Ursula remembered her duty, braced herself vigorously against the back wall, and pushed Barbara along the corridor out into the little garden. Among the somewhat puny bushes, which looked as if they were ashamed to bear seed and perform fertilization within these walls, the sisters lived it up.

To the fantasist Dorothea, these currant bushes became the gardens of Armida, and the sparse shade of a few stunted pear trees became the darkness of the primeval forests of Ceylon. To the malicious Agathe, all the events of this little spot, the poor coincidences that strayed here from the outer world, gave pleasure to needle-pointed remarks, to which Anastasia succumbed, out of some need for humiliation, incessantly exposing herself with intent. Between them mediated the busy Thekla, who felt the desire for activity like a glowing coal inside her. The melancholy Angela walked between the sisters with swollen tear glands, focused on thoughts of an inevitable misfortune, and loved to tread with naked feet on the sharp gravel of the paths in a desire for penitence.

A spirit of complete purposelessness filled all the rooms and the garden of the former patrician house, boiling the blood of these women until it cried out for the doctor's lancet. Still, still, somewhere in hidden corners of the house, in the secret compartments of these souls, there was a pale, turned away ghost that one could almost dare to call hope, the hope of something beyond the walls, from above out of the glistening clouds of summer or from below out of the murmuring earth, a very timid expectation, which in vain repeated its name. In the abbess Basilia this spirit of purposelessness seemed to have united all in its force, and her sober indifference held the shield before her, when her retort damped the excitement of Sister Ursula with one of her peculiar phrases:

"You put these things on too hasty a scale, my child; he will come, for it is his duty, and in the discharge of his duties he was never found remiss without reason."

The busy Sister Thekla burst forth from between two currant bushes, exhorting that she might yet send him a message, and the melancholy Angela uttered an oracle that could be interpreted to mean the death of the doctor Eusebius Hofmayer. An only slightly veiled excitement brought all the sisters together around the headmistress for a consultation and even brought Dorothea from the dark primeval forests of Ceylon. They all trembled for this little event, in which the life of an entire month culminated, and felt themselves led by the same desire to a rare unanimity. The sighs of the devoted Anastasia and the gasps of the phlegmatic Barbara said the same as the silence of the malicious Agathe.

The clanging of the bell, whose ringer was borne by the stone hand of Adam, announced a change in the scene, and prepared them for the entrance of Doctor Eusebius Hofmayer and the pretense of indifference.

"Thank God," Ursula whispered to Thekla, who added:

"Our phlebotomist is coming after all," with a satisfied nod of her head; as the calm of desire welcomed the expected.

The doctor smilingly strode up to the headmistress and bowed to her, asking her to forgive him for his delay:

"I have been detained by urgent business — business! I do not need to assure my venerable patroness and her reverend sisters particularly and explicitly that really only the most difficult and unpostponable negotiations prevented me from fulfilling a duty that seems to me to be the true oasis in the desert in my rather unpleasant profession.”

"Oh —we have patience and can wait, there is no urgency," said the abbess, reaching with pointed fingers for the rosary at her belt.

"Incidentally, I consider it — in all modesty be it granted to me to say this, on the basis of my exact researches even quite expedient and conducive, to heat the blood with a little delay first — how shall I say — a little more, quasi — by your leave — to boil, so that all the foam separates to the surface and all impurity flows off at once."

This was obvious to the sisters, a different one of whom was on duty in the kitchen every week.

Doctor Eusebius Hofmayer took out his tobacco tin, and, sucking in the recognition of his profound wisdom from all around him, he circumstantially savored a pinch.

"If you please, Herr Doktor," said the headmistress, leading the way, followed by the doctor, as usual, at half a step's distance. The sisters joined in, and among the bushes of the garden the black, ugly dresses rustled like a murmur of impatience. At the entrance to the refectory the doctor, with a deep bow, let the procession pass. Then he entered last and closed the door, counting with a smile whether all were assembled. In the bare, sober dining room, hard-surfaced by whitewashed walls, preparations for the bloodletting were taking place. The softly upholstered operating chair stretched out its arms, basins surrounded to receive blood, and pale cloths yearned for the life of the red paint. The water in the large tubs trembled on the surface in ringlets of anticipation, and in the center of these things and the nurses, Eusebius Hofmayer laid his bare instruments on the small table.

"How strangely he clangs his knives," the fantasist Dorothea dared to whisper, and the malicious Agathe replied, "The music of the doctors."

Eusebius Hofmayer nodded at her so vigorously that her malice froze, and repeated, "The music of the doctors, reverend sisters! Why should the doctors not make music? My researches have penetrated deeper than those of my colleagues and have recognized the connection of music with medicine; music is movement and the process of life is movement and related things act upon other related things."

The sisters liked the fact that his words seemed to penetrate like a strange song into the corners of the hall and returned from there floating as tones. Above these harmonies pointedly flickered the tantalizing clash of knives, until a cry from the superior broke into the sisters' absorption.

"The picture ... Who turned the picture against the wall?"

The image of the crucified Savior, the bridegroom of the women in this place of refuge from the noise of the world, which, hand-painted by Master Burgkmeier, watched over the meals of the nuns here in the refectory, hung on the wall with its face turned away. Eusebius Hofmayer stood among the startled sisters with a steely smile, while the abbess strode up to the picture and turned the Savior toward the hall. Then she went back to her place, as if exhausted by a silent effort, and staggered under the weight of a horror, as the doctor's face showed itself strangely transformed to her. His jaws thrust forward, and, gnashing, two rows of pointed teeth bared themselves like saws between narrow, puckered lips. The hand with the pinch stood still before a nose that resembled that of a bat. And in the hollows above the bony cheeks, the headmistress searched in vain for any sign of life. She looked into the eyes of darkness and saw eerie long nights full of whimpering voices.

The sisters were used to follow the leader, and, leaning slightly forward, they froze when they saw Basilia freeze. Suddenly the slimy toads of fear sat in their throats and welled up so that their breath rattled. And all the ghosts of their covetous desires stood behind them, plucking them by the garments and veils and lashing their souls with the scourges of sin.

Eusebius Hofmayer moved farther and farther away from the usual features of his vaccinated scholarliness, grew like a shadow among them, and seemed to displace all light from this high ceilinged room. The bright drawings of the sun on the floor and walls lost the bright colors of their lines, moved as if in agony and retreated distorted and restless into each other, crawled like tormented deformities over the red and white slabs of the floor, and at last fled through the windows into the open air, where they were sucked in by a gelatinous mass. The air of the garden in front of the windows seemed cloudy and ran thickly around the trees and bushes, so that they too seemed to be enclosed in a viscous mass, until every branch and every leaf took on a congealed appearance, as it were an unreal naturalness.

"Blood gives power over blood," Hofmayer said, grabbing sister Thekla by the neck and playfully plunging his iron claws into her skin with short pressure so that small thin jets of blood spurted from the holes.

There was a scream. Loud and shrill and desperate.

"The picture ... the picture!"

The Savior was again hanging on the wall with his face turned away. Then the sisters felt that they were abandoned and given to another cruel

master. Basilia and some others ran to the door, but the doorknob reared up against the abbess and bit her in the arm with clattering teeth. All the flourishes and ornaments turned into serpents, raised small, rough mouths and hissed. The sisters who fled to the windows and wanted to reach the garden were held like flies by the clotted, sticky air. The hall was a prison where a corrupted will was destroying life. The terribly transformed Eusebius Hofmayer followed the insane efforts of the sisters with narrow lips raised above gnashing saws. Under his playing claws, the busy Thekla's neck lengthened.

Over an evil melody of music, the knives and lancets arranged themselves into pairs on the instrument table, dancing a dainty tinkling minuet in the best order.

"Ladies, I beg you to listen a little. What I have to say to you is quite brief and will not detain us too long from the real purpose of my visit."

The nuns, under the doctor's compulsion, returned to the circle of chairs and formed a wreath of the half-dead around him. But another semblance of movement followed his inviting gestures. The whitewashed walls and ceiling of the chamber darkened and trembled as of colors long buried and now coming to life. Shapes stirred beneath the even fetters of the sober whitewash. The whiteness burst, and from among its vanishing shreds rose the vivid majesty of the ground, the images of merriment and pleasure with which a forgotten time had once adorned this hall. All the cheerful nudes, all the high-spirited jokes that sounded from the groups on the walls, shone on the circle of half-dead women. Women stretched out on clouds raised their heads laughingly, curiously, and gleefully pointed their fingers at the condemned, and drunken youths made the hips of the bacchantes swing their golden cups mockingly against the sisters. The laughter of these merrymakers rang between the music of the instruments. And like a rain of fragrance and light, this long lost world, banished under the white blankets, renewed itself in a burst of power and noise.

"We salute you, Saint-Simon," shouted the walls and ceiling.

"I invite you to come down."

"We are coming, we are coming."

The harmless lust of the senses, which had cautiously expressed itself at the gate of this strange house in Adam and Eve, was here fermented to opulence, manifold and delightful like sin and recanted the hypocrisy of paradisiacal simplicity at the entrance. The lust of the senses descended here in a hundred figures and formed a circle of wild spectators around the condemned sisters. Groups intertwined into the positions of the theater and seemed to be waiting for secret cues to swing over into new entanglements, while the loosely wound flower chains, the twisted tendril ornaments dangled loosely from the ceiling between the flowering flesh. Enclosed by this round dance of vivacious folly, sat the sisters, a circle of corpses whose eyes still had the gleam of fear.

In their midst stood the false Eusebius Hofmayer, dusting a grain of snuff in front of his fore shirt, and, interrupting the doctor's familiar

movements with fearfully ape-like grips on the elongated neck of Sister Thekla, with a surprising flailing of iron claws, with the dry crunching of saw-like jaws, it began, like a lawyer bringing a lawsuit:

"Ladies, esteemed Sister Basilia and you other esteemed sisters! These kind gentlemen have saved me the trouble of introducing myself to you by calling me by name as soon as they greeted me. If you remember the gravestone that bears my name, you will be a little surprised to find me still in such good spirits and relatively well. I am really in the best of health and have come to terms quite well with the gentleman whom my friends, the doctors, call death. In exchange for small favors on my part, he provides me with the best dishes from his table and has even granted me certain sovereign rights to the borderlands on this side of decay. You wonder, my reverend sisters, with what right I extend these sovereignties over you. By the power of my jaws! By the right granted to me over all bodies this side of decay."

"Evoe, evoe," shrieked a female in an unfastened girdle, and the sisters sank still deeper into their chairs, as if the last hold of hope had fled from their bodies.

"Saint-Simon! Saint-Simon!"

The barrel whooped, throwing words of fury like flickering whip-lashes over the bodies of the condemned. The hideousness of an orgy of cruelty armed the painted living and drove them against the living dead. The nudity and the lustful, dripping greed advanced in battle lines. But a hint of the ruler shooed them back:

"The feast is mine. And he who wants more than to warm himself in watching must return to the wall."

Then he bowed in the circle of mortal terror, which seemed to give him cheerfulness and comfort, and said in the style of Eusebius Hofmayer:

"To the most reverend sisters' knowledge, that with the favor of the most gracious Sister Basilia I will now proceed to the desired, this time quite thorough bloodletting, allow me in all decisiveness."

He let go of the busy Thekla, whose head dangled with closed eyes from an immensely elongated neck pierced like a flute, and stepped over her collapsing body toward the abbess. Three dainty minuet steps forward, one back, then forward again, until, with a polite bow, he dug his iron claws into her shoulders and grasped her neck with the saws of his gaping jaws, while the raging spectators rattled tambourines and cymbals, howled, fell

upon each other with rutting bodies, and sought in vain to draw the blood they craved from the wounds of their own painted bodies. The narrow street in front of the figures of Adam and Eve was animated by the commotion of unusual sounds. From the cloister came a noise, a wild shouting and-quite clearly-the clashing of cymbals struck hard. The cobbler and the dog raised their heads, looked at each other and tried to regain their equanimity. But there was something so threatening and disturbing in this noise that the dog slunk away with his tail between his legs, and the cobbler with the baker became the focal point of a small gathering. With a broad wing the message flew through the town, arousing laughter and fear, curiosity and apprehension, and sweeping uproar outside the gate whose sides were guarded by Adam and Eve. "The sisters must have been invaded by the devil," said one scoffer.

"But that they are bravely resisting is clearly perceptible," replied a pious man. The crowd began to boil and seemed to want to swell up against the house, pushing toward a man who was waving his hands and shouting in the midst of the people. It was incomprehensible to the cobbler how Dr. Eusebius Hofmayer, whom he had not yet seen return from the monastery, could now appear here with a shifted wig and a curved cane. His fists flew against the gate. But no one understood him. Under the stone trees of Paradise, Adam and Eve smiled, a congealing smile that seemed so terribly knowing and cruel. The smile of adepts of a mystery in which life and death are only the characters of a masque. The excitement beat foamingly against the gate, but the daring of a storm was still distant and incomprehensible, and when the gate wings opened wide, an alley opened into the crowd. The building opened its mouth to reveal its secret, the gentleman in the house robe came out and walked slowly away, nodding to the people. On his bald skull zigzagged the drawings of bone sutures, leathery lips withdrew from bare saws, and from the corners of his mouth trickled two thin, bright-red streaks of blood. In the dust the tassels of the flowered robe dragged, leaving red, damp furrows on the bumpy pavement of the street.

In addition, the midday sun was shining. No one dared to make a sound; only clockwork under the house robe of the strange gentleman purred loudly and powerfully, in a mockery of this silence and the escaping time.

A cry arose after he disappeared, and the crowd heated up to a new courage, which threw them into the long aisle, pressed on them from all

sides, and forming a mob with Eusebius Hofmayer in the center, tore into the dining room.

There the sisters sat in a circle, still held tightly by an invisible center, shrunken in their armchairs, as shells of their former corporeality, now bundles of skins and clothes. From their bodies the contents had been sucked out, and without a trace of spilled blood a terrible bloodletting had been performed on them. The walls were strangely transformed; instead of the white smooth whitewash, there were wildly moving, colorful scenes of serene gaiety, bacchanalian frenzy, and frenzy of the senses, set by a strong and bold brush in radiant sunny landscapes. The image of the Savior, however, hung between two voluptuous painted women, looking out of dark sockets, its eyes cut out, at the circle of dead sisters. A myriad of small knives, lancets and needles had penetrated his face, neck and chest, as if the crucified had been used as a razor strop. And Eusebius Hofmayer, who knew the picture well, noticed the terrible change in the features, the distortion of the cut face, and saw that the mouth, which had formerly been tightly closed, stood wide open as if in a cry of horror.

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6

The Sixth Companion

The forest on the Bohemian border is always dark.

During the day, the fearful sister of the night lives in it: the twilight. But when night comes over the mountains, the werewolf howls in the thicket and in the high moor the treacherous moor man strangles the stag until it sinks, gasping. The sky wields a bloody scourge over the darkness, and down on the plain a homestead burns.

The two travelers stumble along the crooked country road. "I'm guessing," says Christian, "that the inn will be here soon."

The other laughs sardonically, "If the devil hasn't swallowed them down his vile, fetid throat; to resist and vex honest craftsmen."

They stumble on. The bloody scourge in the sky jags around, like a broad, devouring firelight. But it only indicates the way, it does not shine, and the two fellows run their heads into the trees. Finally there is a light in front of them.

"Heda, Herberg'! The brush binder and cooper are here."

"You are welcome here." The innkeeper stands wide in the doorway.

Behind him are light and refreshment, hearth and home. Three are already sitting at the wide table. There is a smell of roasted meat, and the two companions' stomachs tighten.

"By your leave!"

Christian and Gotthold put their small bundles in the corner and lean their walking sticks against them. Then they move to the table.

So now they sit together, prop up their elbows and give off the stench of wanderers: sweat and dust and the growl of unsatisfied guts. Five companions, thrown together by chance and night in a lonely inn on the Bohemian border.

Christian Borst, the brush binder. Gotthold Schlägel, the cooper. Sebastian Springer, the tinker. Johannes Ambrosius, the balladeer. Georg Engelhardt Löhneiß, the glutton. The honorable craftsmen want to go to Saxony, to Meissen, to take work and refreshment from an honest master.

But the three travelers want to go to the other side, to Bohemia. There

is a market in Goldenstein tomorrow.

Each goes about his life, reaching with trembling hands for the green soap bubble of happiness. They sit at the table and prop up their elbows, knowing no more about each other than their dust-weary, dull eyes can see. Each rests in a different world, in a fearful, devouring loneliness, and can say nothing to the other; their souls, like dead moths with outstretched wings, fall slowly, slowly deeper and deeper into the bottomless pit past glittering world systems and white stretched milky ways from a sad wasteland into an even sadder one ...

The lacerating fear of all living things lashes them with iron barbs...

But chance and the night have thrown them into this lonely inn. They want to celebrate their togetherness. There is not really a reason for celebration, if not the happiness of having before them the semblance of someone else who may be suffering just as much as the one who is asking and struggling in the same way without knowing it.

They want to booze.

A strong red ray comes from the hearth fire. The bright reflection from a copper frying pan. The young landlady and the maid put a piece of meat in it, with pepper, salt and onions. John Ambrose ordered it. He pays for it. It stews and sizzles in the frying pan. The companions interrupt their conversation and listen when the fat splashes up. The innkeeper has sat down with them, and they talk all kinds of stupid stuff: about the times, about the Turks and the Spaniards, wisdom of the highways, fragments from the past. In the meantime, they chew dry bread to fill their stomachs because the pepper meat is not enough for everyone to get full. The serving-girl, however, must already now run diligently and fill the tin cups with Bohemian beer. What will it be like when the pepper meat burns in the throat?

The three travelers pay for all, because tomorrow there will be money again. So:

Sa ... sa ...sa, you devilish brothers,
drink yourselves full of sticke -wicke,
and whoever falls, rise up again
like a foolish godlike pig...
blubbering, stumbling,
staggering into bliss,
feasting with stuffed cheeks,

Sa, sa, sa ... and boozes and shouts:
Gaudeamus, glim, glam, Gloria,
All this has happened once before.

That resounds. The old, thick pewter tankards on the walls hum along, and the glassware clinks finely and nobly between them. But it is not cheerfulness but fear that drives them. And even the flames of the hearth seem to tremble and flicker timidly. Up in the corner hangs a black shadow larva, dangling in the red light.

And when it gets quiet, the travelers and the innkeeper look at each other, and everyone is afraid to say the first word. The tavern maid is frightened by the clattering of the jugs she fills at the barrel, the landlady wants to tear the meat out of the pan so it doesn't splatter and spray; the conversation goes on laboriously and heavily like an old beggar sleeping while walking.

But that is why they are guzzling with all of their strength.

"This boozing is a quite miserable, abominable, sour, unnatural vice," said Johannes Ambrosias. He is a runaway preacher and still sometimes mistakes an inn for a church.

The brush-binder takes a tremendous swig:

"Say in words what the German vice really is."

"Yes sir," said the gobbler, tapping his belly, which is as big as a land-servant's drum, "but it feeds his man."

The pepper meat is ready and served. As the landlady passes the fireworks, he pinches her thighs from behind. The landlady squeals, the companions laugh, the landlord smirks. It doesn't matter; it will be added to the bill later, after they are all drunk. After the pepper meat, their thirst becomes like a wild animal. The Bohemian beer is quite light, but its quantities confuse the heads and put a red haze in front of their eyes. The shadows leaning against the wall behind the travelers come alive and stagger back and forth...

“Lillelalle… rickeracke…

0h, there are other beautiful songs...

Frau Venus in the comfortable old bed,
Douche bag –douche bag dudeldumm,
As good as it can be with her,
Douche bag –douche bag dudeldumm,
Herr Bacchus is even greater,

He chases us around the world,
He makes us lame and crippled
Und in spite of that we like him better,
Douche bag –douche bag dudeldumm …”

Loud ... roaring ... Löhneiß cries:

"Companions, may the devil grant me this wish. I want to drown to my death in grace, so that my eyes splash into the firmament and my entrails wrap themselves around the belly of the world."

And the others all cry out, "Me too, me too."

Then something moves through the tangled shadows behind the table, like a gust of wind, the shadows bend and strive towards each other and unite into a hideous lump. Arms, legs, body and head push against each other and form a single body. A broad hat with a feather billowing behind, a rusty rapier; a fellow of the Passau warrior folk, as they dwell scattered all over Bohemia, stands in the dark corner. No one has seen him. Only the serving-girl. Horror tears her eyes and mouth open and makes her outstretched arm stiff. The fellow comes out of the corner, crosses his legs over the bench and then suddenly sits in the middle of the companions. But they, together with the landlady and the maid, are already so drunk that they don't find this surprising at all.

"Hopla," says the fellow, "Heda, fresh pitchers and other beers. What does everyone want? My treat. Brayhahn, Hamburger, Einbecker, Windisch, Arnstädter, Zellisch beer, Gose, Muhme or English beer?"

"In our cellars there is only Bohemian beer," said the landlord ruefully.

"Oh well, your cellars ... if it is my treat, then I’ll stay away from your cellars."

The travelers are for English beer.

The Passauer waves. But the serving-girl doesn't move, just stands with her arm outstretched and her eyes open. Then he laughs and waves once more. And the mugs come through the air by themselves and stand in front of the guests and the innkeeper. A nice black beer foams over.

"A good trick," slurred the tinker. Then they drink. Ah!

"You're a magician," said Löhneiß, "probably trying to make money in Goldenstein tomorrow by the devil's skill."

"No, I've just come here today and in your honor. But away with the little mugs. The right tankards for the right travelers."

The door opens and in comes, one after the other, from the kitchen,

cellar and stable, the largest dishes, as if they had feet: tubs, buckets, kettles, milk cans. They climb onto the table. The dishes from the maid’s chamber place themselves in front of her. And immediately they are all filled with beer. The dirt sticks everywhere finger thick around the edges and handles, fat and soot are in layers on top of each other. But that doesn't matter. They drink, and they like it. They empty the monstrous dishes in one gulp. The landlord drains the bucket, the landlady the milk tub, the tinker the fire bucket, the brush-binder the laundry kettle, the cooper the water tub, the gobbler the rain barrel and the maid the chamber pot. It is as if the beer were pouring into an abyss. Only a splashing and rushing, as if from a torrent.

"Now I will give you each a particularly delicious beer to taste, whichever one you like best."

"A Rosemary beer, which is so excessively good for those melancholic," says the sad John Ambrose.

"Croatian beer, which helps against gout and colic," said the innkeeper.

"Alant root beer, beneficial against female silliness," said the tinker, sliding his hand under the thigh of the landlady.

"Lavender beer, which strengthens the head and is a delightful thing against sleep," said the brush binder and snorted violently in his fat.

"Lemon balm beer, which strengthens the heart and helps against pregnancy," said the landlady.

"Sage beer, with which the wobbling teeth stand firm and the trembling of the kneecaps and other limbs fades away," said the cooper, who always has the autumn aches.

"Clove beer, which makes the stomach like iron and expand like a house," said the food glutton.

"Wormwood beer, which drives the worms out of the brain and is good against stupidity," said the maid.

"Done," said the magician, and from the tumblers, buckets, and tubs rises a many-colored vapor that smells like the whole of India. Pungent and sweet, soft and bitter and mild, hot and cool. -

They all drink and praise the master.

"What else can you do?"

"I'm coming already," and he pulls out a silver-lined skull from which he drinks. The head has silver rims around the jaws so that the teeth gleam dully, silver rims around the steep nostrils, the eye sockets are lined with

silver so that the hearth light flickers red in them, and the top of the skull is lifted away so that one can drink from it comfortably.

"The devil has given you a magnificent magical mug," roared the glutton. And the landlady squeals, because she is amused and because Sebastian Springer tickles her: Ihiihihi… hahi…

But Sebastian Springer ... ha, Springer, that's one. He doesn't want to accept the trick that the fellow does. He can also do some tricks… halloh! By the way, the skull doesn't scare him at all; you can find one in any market stall. He pulls a frog out of his pocket and starts if up. Pschurrrr rrrrr rar ... the critter jumps around the room ... kak kak kak ... on the table, between the pots and buckets... on the window sill... kaks ... now it's bursting ... no ... it jumps onto the hearth and gets bigger and bigger, like a real frog, but glowing.

Even bigger ... Sebastian Springer has every hair on his head standing straight up ... now it is already as big as a chained dog and stares over at them with fiery eyes. Pschurrrr ... vicious and wild, like thunder. The tinker now knows that the sixth companion has played a trick on him. But he doesn't give in yet. He pulls his largest snake out of the bag and turns it on. Slowly it rises from the ashes, gray and inconspicuous, pushing one ash ring after another across the table, between the pots and buckets ... one ash ring after another...

"Hellfire and brimstone stop," cries Springer, and tries to crush it. But then the snake turns a beautiful green and dark blue, with stripes all over its body, it curls and sticks out its tongue, and sparks fly all over its body, and it grows longer and longer out of the ashes, and in front of it is a small, lively head with black, pointed eyes. It creeps over the edge of the table, onto the floor, towards the serving-girl, who still stands with wide open eyes and outstretched arm, creeps up to her, winds itself like a bracelet around her wrist, puts one ringlet next to the other up to the armpit and then seeks her mouth with its small, red tongue ...

Then John Ambrose begins to weep. He cries over the misery of the world, about his lost life and about the fact that his great-grandmother had to die so young. His tears are as big as pigeon eggs and leave deep furrows on his cheeks. They scorch his clothes like fiery coals, and where they fall on the floor, they burn out large holes.

"He who is ripe, let him fall off," said the sixth companion.

And then John Ambrose cries even harder. Already you can see the

white bones of the jaws in his face, and his nose is all eaten away by the tears. His body sinks down like butter in the sun and is completely soaked with the burning wetness of his tears.

The brush binder has to laugh so terribly at this. At first, just like the clanking of old iron. Then, as a wagon with stones drives over the bridge, and finally, as the earth shakes. The windows shake and the table wobbles. His face turns red. Crimson, as the sun sets; then black as the cloaks of the councilmen, and finally he becomes completely black as a dark, moonless night, blacker and blacker, like the world before the first light. His belly is blown open so that it reaches to the ceiling.

"Let him who is ripe fall off," said the sixth companion.

There is a sudden gust so that all the lights go out and a wind as if a storm has entered the house. As soon as the light comes back, the bush binder has disappeared. His intestines are only stuck here and there on the ceiling, his brain above the front door, and his legs are on top of the honorary tankard standing on the ledge.

"Pschurrrr kaks ...” sounds the glowing frog from the stove.

"But let's not think about these sad cases any further and devote ourselves to drinking noble wines," said the fellow dressed in black.

Now they drink noble wines: Malvasia, Rhinefall, Neckarblume and spice wines, Borago-, Ox-tongue-, Fennel-, Anise-, Nägelein-, Augentrost-, Isop-, Wacholderbeer-, Laurel wines. Wines that are called:

"Give-me-my-innocence-again", "You will really enjoy", "Don’t Leave", "Whistle of the world", "Look into the glass", "Stay seated", "Guzzle more".

And so that the wine would not be without food, little living fish, frog spawn and young eels swim in the tubs. Hotter and hotter ... it rushes down the throats, like torrents in narrow gorges. The landlady goes to the side, unlaces her bodice and unties her skirts, then comes back and continues drinking ... douche bag, douche bag glim glam gloria!!!

Ah, the good Johannes Ambrosias; they forgot all about him. Where is he? They search and call: “Johannes Ambrosias.”

But he is no longer there. Only on the bench a large, wet spot, in which the last glowing tears still bubble and hiss.

The innkeeper and the cooper reproach each other for not having paid more attention:

"Such a faithful, understanding fellow traveler and drinking companion. Their eyes stand fixed and glazed like fists from their red-swollen faces. And then they continue to argue fiercely about gout and toothache, because they had forgotten what they started to argue about. They argue about the crown of pains. The innkeeper wants to elevate his gout above all torments, and the bearded man praises his toothache as hell on earth. Their heads become as big as pumpkins with rage, and at last they jump at each other's throats, bite each other, fall to the ground, and now roll around in the corners, roaring, stomping, and bleeding.

"Those who are ripe, fall off," said Passau, who always sits silently in his seat.

Then the two grab each other with renewed fury and pull each other around, as if they wanted to shake the souls out of their bodies. The innkeeper succeeds in tearing off one of the cooper's arms. He hits the good lad over the head with it incessantly. But the cooper is not lazy and jumps into the innkeeper's stomach with both feet, so that the boots come out in his back.

"Pschurrrr!", sounds the glowing frog on the hearth and shakes with laughter.

The snake giggles too, and all the tubs, buckets and dishes start grinning. They both fell down. The cooper can no longer pull his legs out of the host's body and shouts that his boots should be taken off. The host dies. But in the agony of dying he still quickly grabs the face of his enemy and tears out his distended eyes with a jerk. From the empty sockets shoots the cloudy, stinking liquid, decomposed, fermenting beer and wine with pieces of fish spawn and languidly wriggling eels. The cooper sinks down and dies.

The tinker and the landlady, however, don't mind at all that the landlord's stomach has been kicked in. They can now make love without being disturbed. And they start right away. The sixth companion has pulled out a small, screeching flute and blows on it. The flute only enflames the

two more. The tinker has taken the landlady on his lap and is tearing off her clothes. She screams and throws herself at his neck. And then they fall over each other like animals. He burrows inside her like a foundry man in liquid metal. Her arms are clamps, hollowing the man's body so that the ends curve upward like clamped rods. Head and legs high up, only his middle is on the body of the woman.

"Those who are ripe, fall off," said the fellow in black.

A sharp, poisonous, hot scream. A single scream. Blood emerges from the woman's back, zigzags across the floor, and mixes with the mass of tears of the unfortunate Johannes Ambrosias, the liquid interiority of poor Gotthold Schlägel, the oil of the immortalized Christian Borst, and the entrails of her own blessed husband. With a dull crack, she pushes through the spine of the metal worker in a spasm, his upturned ends sink down, and with a sigh his soul flutters away. His dead body lies limply on top of the dead.

The maid's mind stops over these things.

The fellow in black glares at her from crooked eyes and mumbles carelessly,

"Those who are ripe, fall off."

Then the worms, which now, because her mind has stopped, and are no longer being moved, begin to crawl out of her brain. Nasty, white-grey worms, at the same time from the nose, eyes, ears and mouth. They swarm and wriggle, jerking back and forth as if they couldn't quite take the air. They want to go back. But others are pushing after them. Red worms, blue worms, green worms. They bite each other and rear up. They hang out of her eyes and mouth like violet curls grown in the wrong places. Violet-colored, moving curls. Oh how beautiful! The head of the maid is like an old cheese, perforated and soft, and slowly the porridge runs down her shoulders ... Then the glutton knows who the black Passauer is. But a true German eating and drinking glutton does not surrender. He throws it in the face of the devil and defies him.

"Good," says the devil and accepts the bet.

The glutton quickly prays to his patron, St. Ulrich, and hopes that he will win. He has won every time so far. Most recently in Augsburg against a fat Pomeranian, whom he beat by three legs of veal. So they start all over again. The only thing the gobbler regrets is that no one is watching, because there is no one left but the petrified serving-girl. He has never eaten and

drunk so beautifully. Even not in Nuremberg, where he paid three pennies admission. At last the devil feels very sick. And he realizes that even he is no match for a real German glutton. But the morning is already dawning, and he must soon be finished here. Then he bends to the glutton: "You honor your art, Master Löhneiß, you are almost above me. But I wonder if you are aware of what you have ingested here."

"I think black-English beer, spiced wine and distilled wine. Three mighty oxen, twelve plate cheeses, nine chipmunks, and six shocks of hard eggs. Bread not to be counted."

"So it seemed. But in truth it was the bacon of your deceased grandfather and the watery spleen of your dead grandmother, the juice of dead dogs buried in the field. The pus and rottenness of everything that has ever been alive, that has grown in bread and come to life again in animals, that has been turned into wine and beer. The old gentleman up there is not so rich that he could throw away something. But he knows how to change the taste. That's it.

"Then an illuminating light tells the glutton that the devil has spoken the truth. And the disgust comes out of his stomach like a slimy newt, crawls into his throat and settles here. It swells up and wants to suffocate him. Löhneiß jumps up, runs up and down the room and roars. He scratches at the walls and tears at his face with his bloody fingers. Madness stands behind him with its scourge, whipping sparks from his limbs.

"He who is ripe, let him fall away," the devil says softly. He almost feels sorry for this capable man.

The glutton jumps to the table, rips open a knife and stabs it into his stomach. With all his strength, he spins it quickly in a circle. A large piece of the abdominal wall falls out, the stomach, the guts slide to the floor, and in the grayish stench he realizes that everything inside him is already beginning to turn to pus and rot.

"It is the truth," he cries, falls down and is dead.

Then the devil rises. His black figure almost fills the entire hut. He looks around and smiles.

"A good piece"

Then he strides out. As he passes the serving-girl, around whose still outstretched arm hangs a gray, much twisted ash bracelet, he gives her a push. Her corpse collapses into a small heap of ashes...

Outside, dawn creeps through the forest. There is a yellow, sick light in

the east. The bloody scourge in the sky fades and goes away.

The devil settles down on his hands ... The cloak and rapier fall off, a shaggy fur shoots up around his body, and a bushy tail stretches out behind. Howling, he trots into the forest.

In the distance, other werewolves answer with howling whimpers. Down in Goldenstein, a faint, trembling bell rings for early mass.

Laertes

The director telephoned it to the theater secretary, who had just had to put up with all the horrors of the “Wolf's Gorge”, the theater secretary immediately passed the tremendous news on to the director, the director passed it on to Samiel, Agathe and Kaspar, Agathe told her colleague from the theater, who admired her in the darkness of the wings, and like a waterfall from the heights, the news rushed out of the bright heights; branching out, spreading, skipping over all obstacles, sparkling and appearing down to the lowest and darkest theatre worker. Between the sinking of two and three, between "Twilight" and "Moon Shine" on the rigging loft, under the bridge on which Agathe's ghost appeared, behind the bristling back of the wild boar and next to the rumbling drum of the waterfall, they whispered about it. Then the news poured out into the city and brought the world, the center of which are the rarities of the theater, into great excitement. The waiter at the City Theater Café discreetly served the latest stage gossip with the coffee and milk and calculated the daily rate of his tip from the surprised look of the guest. All the friends of the arts shook their heads and the oldest among them could not even listen, as if they had been turned into pagodas through terror. Out of this news rattled a lot of conversations, of conjectures, of aphorisms, of good and bad jokes, like the ribbons, bouquets, bonbonnières, and rabbits from the magician's top hat.

At eleven in the morning, Josef Prinz had told the director that he was ready to play Hamlet, and when he came home at three in the afternoon, his landlady was waiting for him with festively doubled layers of makeup and eyebrows that were a bit out of place with excitement.

Her toes were agonized from hovering and her arms were flapping up and down like the wings of an abandoned windmill:

"I heard, I heard ... oh, I'm beside myself. Is it possible, Mr. Prinz! Oh; you want us again, I can’t believe it… you want to give us your Hamlet again. Oh... that monologue! The way you spoke it...!"

Prinz pushed past the wind milling wings and fought his way to the door of his apartment. Between two turns and three exclamations, he slipped past the danger and on the threshold of his door, struck the pose of a Caesar who gives away a portion of the world, and shouted:

"You shall have a free pass."

Then he secured his safety with a strong, burglar-proof bolt. But at four o'clock he had to open the door to the theater servant, who brought him the role and a bunch of tactless questions and insinuations. At five, the postman handed him twenty-three letters in delicate colors from lilac to pink, with scents ranging from musk to heliotrope, with the most glowing expressions of heartfelt adoration and hot longing for the reunion of the divine Hamlet.

At half past five, his friend Gustav Rietschl arrived with the twilight. He found Hamlet dressed in gray, with two red bloodstains of the sinking evening on his chest and shoulders, and the flexible Epee in front of him, so that the narrow blade jumped in a semicircle from the face mask to the floor. The mirror reproduced all this once again, more pallid, grayer and more lifelessly rigid than reality.

"I hear you want to play Hamlet again."

"I have decided to do it. The director pushed me hard to make the Shakespeare cycle possible and why shouldn't I play Hamlet again. My best role ... laughable!"

"If you yourself have gotten over it, why shouldn't you play it? Certainly!"

"I have gotten over it."

Prinz smartly flicked the blade, so that it softly clinked against the face mask. The bloody stains on his chest and shoulders spread into the gray, blurred and trembled into the darkness.

His friend saw the narrow black edge of the blade go out from Hamlet's hand, like an unconscious extension of the will.

"How long has it been?"

"You are lucky that you did not have to pay those years. Five years of banishment at the best and height of my power."

"I can only imagine that any repeat performance would bring back to you all the horror of that time."

"A whim, my dear, a whim. Or do you think, perhaps, my conscience… Will you perhaps say that it is more than an unhappy coincidence ...?"

"But ... But, Prinz! You still don't seem to have quite gotten over it. Your agitation at the time caused a nervous breakdown."

"Yes, it was terrible when he lay before me like that. Blood on his doublet and my sword full of blood. Not a theatrical death, from which one rises to bow laughingly to the applause of the audience, but a real death. A

few more twitches and spasms and then numb to the applause. The applause was terrible. They didn’t know anything and believed it was a triumph of acting. Fontinbras had to find the words that had frozen the rest of us."

The landlady brought a lamp, glad to have found a pretext to get to Prinz. But her loveliness and the increased colorfulness of her face did not attract any attention. When she left sulking, Hamlet put the sword on the table.

"A coincidence, friend, an unhappy coincidence. An oversight of the prop master and death stood among us. I swear to you, a coincidence."

"There is no doubt in anyone's mind."

"Since then, I have been carrying my own weapons, which I believe are blunt and harmless."

He bored the tip of the sword against the palm of his hand as if to convince a judge of his innocence.

"And yet, when the blades cross on the stage, I tremble, and my fencing skills are no better than those of any extra."

"I noticed."

"Did you notice! Really! Maybe the audience noticed it too. And since then, you know, I don't feel complete anymore. The critics spare me. But I don't want any handout of applause. When I have played Hamlet again, I will be free. I have to face a Laertes again, I have to see him rise and laugh, you know, then I will have defeated this gray ghost.”

He grew to full slenderness and then fell out of a swift fencer's stance with a few lunges that pierced a bodiless enemy. Then the rapier sank as if in despair of victory.

"You were ... isn’t it true, you were the one that was around me the most then, weren't you? When I was in a fever of nerves. What did I say in my deliriums? I mean, what did my fantasies consist of?"

"Fragments from Hamlet for the most part. There was a lot about Ophelia and also Laertes. You called them by their civilian names and mixed up the relationships. There was a little reality in it, too, because I think the rumor of your relationship with the widow was right after all."

"Nonsense!”

"Not so?" I thought, because she did break her engagement with Pönale right before that. People talked about it, and some wanted to know, if there was a big row between you because of the Laertes-Tiefenbach thing.”

"Nonsense! Nonsense!"

"It seems to have worried you, though. You spoke freely of it when you were feverish."

"Nothing but fevered ideas. My brain took what it found of it and mixed it all together. I thank you, but you don't speak of it, in fact its best if we don't speak of it anymore. Come, my father's spirit, let's go and conjure demon alcohol."

They equipped themselves, passed by the celebratory painted landlady, regal as kings and secretive as conspirators, and in the back room of the "Blue Monkey's Wife" summoned the demon alcohol.

The rehearsals of "Hamlet" were taken very diligently this time. Prinz, who stood on the stage with his lips tight, pale and determined, resisted any sloppiness and everyone trembled at the prospect of a second outburst, as in the first rehearsal. He had grabbed a slacking extra and thrown him into the wings with two slaps, so that he whimpered and threw himself down at the feet of Polonius. The extra had complained about the rough treatment by Hamlet, but the others guarded themselves against calling up his wrath by poor rehearsals. Almost eerily, motionless as a stone guest, Prinz stood among his colleagues, who were very much dampened in their mood, and the light jokes that usually slipped around in the dark corners were restrained. In front of his implacable face, the jokes that had been customary in the past broke into pathetic words full of modesty and fear, as if there was something that stood in front of them, the importance of which was far above all appearances on the stage.

“Like one who plays his own death on stage," King Claudius whispered to Gustav Rietschl, who had to mime the ghost of Hamlet's father. The young actor of Laertes, who had only been engaged with the theater for two years, dared to ask the dangerous question about the accident of his predecessor. His curiosity bounced off Rietschl's taciturnity and he had to content himself with what King Claudius could tell him in the afternoon at a tarot game of incoherent fragments of smells, baroque fragments, daring conjectures and malicious innuendos. What he heard there excited him, and he felt a tingling sensation of stepping into a place both cursed and consecrated by death. In his fantasy Prinz clothed himself in the armor of the strange and mysterious, and from one whispered word came to him the precious delights of a fearful loathing.

Between two rounds King Claudius had leaned far forward, so that Güldenstern, the onlooker, could not hear:

"They say, but you must keep your mouth shut about it, that it was not a coincidence, but instead …well, that it was, intentional, because of Tiefenbach and over Ophelia. A powerful and trendy Pagatultimo took King Claudius on a different track, and the young Laertes himself had to go into the magic forest of possibilities and search. His eagerness and nervous tension increased and the experience of crossing blades with a murderer seemed even more wonderful to him. This idea attracted him like an abyss, and he felt as fascinated as a lion tamer is of a tremendous danger, which is incomprehensible and therefore all the greater and more beautiful. He was therefore quite beside himself and doubted God's justice when, the day before the performance, he felt the signs of a severe influenza. Although he invested a part of his monthly fee in cognac, the fever forced him to bed in the afternoon, and the doctor took away all prospect of the great experience of the following evening.

The director and the theater secretary were no less distressed, cursing the bad weather, which did not affect the playbill at all, and likewise reaching for the cognac. By the fifth glass, the secretary suggested that Laertes be replaced by a lesser actor. But the director waved his hand in front of his face: never, never, never would Prinz agree to casting an inferior performer.

"He wants to rehabilitate himself in a certain way. He wants to shine and show everyone what he can do. This is simply impossible. By the seventh glass, finally, the way out shone in wonderful, clarity.

"Hildemann from Prague can do it!" cried the secretary, half rising from his velvet fauteuil, and "Hildemann from Prague!" thundered the director.

They brought their proposal to Prinz, and he nodded in agreement with Hamlet’s gloomy mien.

“Hildemann from Prague is good," said Gustav Rietschl and reassured his friend, who was uneasy about the change. "With Hildemann, you don't need a rehearsal, he is solid and has already played with the best people, and you can rely on him.”

Hildemann agreed and promised to arrive at the right time, shortly before the performance – it was impossible for him to arrive earlier. Prinz was full of boiling anxiety the day of the performance.

“I would have liked to rehearse with him," he said to the wardrobe dresser in the evening, as he put on his sword. Then he paced up and down

the dark stage and looked into the empty house, returning again and again to his friend, who had been enveloped in the veils of a spirit.

"I am very anxious, I beg you, do not leave me."

"No wonder, if you have stage fright today ..."

"Stage fright? ... I almost want to say fear... Only the devil knows ... is Hildemann here yet?"

"I don't know. But he must certainly be here by now."

And Prinz continued to walk on the stage, still filled with all the horrors of the unliving, from the curtain to the edge of the terrace of the castle of Helsingr and back again, as if he wanted to shatter the agony of loneliness with his steps. The guards drew up and leaned their halberds against the painted towers, still pulling up their boots and tightening their ruffs, and Hamlet shuddered at their shadows, as if they crept out from a strange, incomprehensible world. This time no confidence came to him from the lively, filled house, from the audience gathered with expectations, and filled with a restlessness, he did not dare to inquire about someone behind the scenes who seemed to be missing.

The signal to begin jerked him up, and with a plotting fright he began to regret what was now irrevocable. The question of why he had gotten involved in this cruel play full of uncomfortable memories, full of bloody figures, assailed him, and he now hoped to find that the meaning of the desperate back and forth in the background of the stage was the absence of Hildemann. Then the performance would be impossible, would have to be canceled at the last moment, and from out of all his fears would appear a path of salvation for him. But after his first scene a shadow awaited him and approached him.

"Mr. Hildemann?"

"Mr. Prinz?"

Hamlet's father joked over the lateness.

"Oh, I am reliable. If I have agreed to come, I will surely come."

"Shouldn't we quickly rehearse the last scene?"

"The battle? It is not necessary. You fence well, and you shall see that I am a competent opponent. Let's do it already..."

Laertes took leave of Polonius and Ophelia. His warning to Hamlet was dry and tawdry and yet strangely unnerving. Then he disappeared, and when Hamlet, who was driven about by a frightful restlessness, tried to look for him, he was not to be found, as if he were really beyond an unbridgeable

sea. Trembling, his soul lay on its knees in the scene with the ghost of his father. The unreal and ghostly nature of the so familiar event acted like poison in his blood until, with a flickering in his eyes and a buzzing in his ears, he almost collapsed at the end.

In the audience, shivers of awe responded to Hamlet's fear which was forced into the confines of art. People were afraid of the revelation of mystical events, of a strange symbiosis of drama and reality, and they attributed all the excitement to the incomparable acting of the performer.

Hamlet appeared at the ramp and bowed, deathly pale and with twitching hands before the enthusiastic house. Then he chased after Hildemann again without being able to find him. Rietschl had tucked back the veils of the spirit and looked like a Bedouin chief. He wanted to give his friend a handshake and show his calm support, but Prinz grabbed him and almost pulled him over:

"You listen, you listen, that's not Hildemann at all..."

"Well, if it isn't, who could it be ...?"

It is not Hildemann. I know him from the pictures ..."

"And I know him personally and I'm telling you its Hildemann ..."

"Don't you see, man, for God's sake, how beneath his face a second one always wants to come forward. It's as if he has two layers. One face battles with the other and forces it back. . . But it will break out . . ."

"Have you had too much cognac for fear of influenza?"

"For God's sake! Doesn't anyone see it? Doesn't anyone see that he hates me? In the scene with Ophelia, how he gnashed his teeth and rolled his eyes when he spoke of Hamlet. This is not play; this is real hatred ... beyond all masks. And where is he, where is he? I want to confront him."

"William, don't fall off the stage."

"Don't make fun. I beg you; don't leave me... stay close to me. Always close to me. I want to tell you something terrible, I am afraid for myself."

Rietschl began to worry that the performance would end in a refusal and increased all the suggestive forces of his friendship. Between silent brooding, a confused indifference, a rapid twitching and an unsteady irritability, the portrayal of Hamlet went on. He gave the appearance of a condemned man, who crawls into himself before the destruction and then hits the walls again with his fists. The monologue over "to be or not to be" (Being or Nothingness) fluctuated between melancholic apathy and terrible outbursts; the last sentences came out meekly and indistinctly, while the

teeth bit the lips, so that after the last words two thin streams of blood trickled over his naked chin. No one had ever laughed so cruelly, the mockery of the stage had never been so clashing and sharp, a whole collection of finely crafted instruments of torture, and the audience cheered and could not contain itself with delight. It felt carried away, as if itself were involved and felt the agonies of this brain voluptuously in itself, as the crunching of the saw in the operating room cuts easily through the bone.

The theater doctor came onto the stage during the interlude and caught Hamlet in a corner, "You're wearing yourself out. What are you trying to do?"

But Prinz laughed, roughly pushed the doctor away from him and, accompanied by his despairing friend, ran off to look for Hildemann. His fear affected the remaining actors, and over the performance on the stage an inkling of terrible foreboding began to arise. The poetry trembled in all its depths, and the actors looked at each other during the interludes as if they were now about to learn the real meaning of all these events.

"Search, search," Hamlet shouted to the stage manager, the director, the dressers, and everyone searched for the missing Laertes.

When the scene of his return came in the fourth act, he was suddenly there, entered the stage and joined the play coldly and stonily, as if he did not notice that the others were afraid to stand near him. He discussed Hamlet's murder with King Claudius and remained calm and certain, only animated by a secret joy, as if something long awaited was finally about to inevitably happen. Behind the scene, Hamlet, sitting and heavily supported by his friend, paid attention to all the intricacies of the treachery, and it seemed that he was overcome as if by new and unexpected news. His restlessness was overwhelmed by a crude heaviness, and congealed inertia, brought on by the threatening colossus, blinking out of small, cruel eyes. But the action flowed on inexorably and tore away all the delays that Hamlet tried to invent in between acts. A pause was demanded, and he enjoyed it like a reprieve, silently wandering up and down with his friend between the graves that had been raised for the next scene.

In the cemetery, at Ophelia's grave, Hamlet and Laertes collided. It was a collision that shook the audience, and the wrestling in the open grave developed in a gruesome seriousness, a fight from which Hamlet escaped with empty eyes and wavering knees.

The applause of the house was thickened by fear, and only Laertes

appeared on the stage, with long, strangely flapping arms and a smile that seemed thoroughly inappropriate and confused, while Hamlet held his friend tightly behind the scene.

"That is death," - he gasped - "that is death."

"Nonsense; hold out, it's almost over."

"It's over yes, because that's death. He caught me once and then let me go. Didn't you see his other face come up, and when he pressed me, I could see that he wasn't breathing. He's not breathing, man!"

"You're going to have to go to bed right after this. You've got a fever. It has affected you too much. The memory is still too strong..."

"He's come back to life, he's killing me. This Laertes will kill me. I don't want to go out there anymore..."

The producer and the director fought his resistance, broke him and chased Hamlet back out.

"Prinz!" exclaimed the stage manager.

"In a moment."

He grabbed his friend by the shoulder and jerked his face toward him.

"I must tell you before I go. Someone must know. You! that time was no accident. It was murder on purpose. Laertes was murdered, I killed him."

"Mr. Prinz!"

"I'm coming."

And Hamlet joined Horatio in the hall of the battle scene. Laertes was standing in the wings, somewhere between the scenes waiting for his cue. He was not seen, but it was known that he was there and that nothing could prevent him from entering the stage. Confused by his friend's fear and his confession, Rietschl did not dare to look for him and only saw how the proceedings of the stage dragged on, how Hamlet's words dragged on, striving for little stays. King Claudius set his expressive, excited gestures almost in the face of the theater doctor, and then the whirl of the action tore him out as well, where a strange tension trembled and waited for its release.

Behind Rietschl, two firemen made half-loud remarks:

"The Hamlet, he's playing today, it's magnificent."

"Yes, he plays as if it is life and death..."

Laertes suddenly stood among the people of the scene. Rietschl saw how everyone turned towards him, attracted and repelled at the same time, and how they then all involuntarily tried to gather around Hamlet as around an opposite pole. The frame of the drama swayed like a storm-tossed tower,

in no danger of falling, but willing to ride the trembling of the structure. Laertes stood among the courtiers, slender, lithe, smiling, and now it seemed to Rietschl himself that this could not be Hildemann. He played with the blade in a bewitching way, forcing its suppleness into great lines that for a moment stood in the air like signs.

The fight began. The blades found and bound each other, hissed like snakes, and met in wild thrusts and parries. They were swift and stealthy, lurking and brutal, animated beings wrestling with each other on the edge of an abyss. The fight dragged on for a long time, far beyond the duration of a mere play, and while the director spoke desperately to Fortinbras, Rietschl was horrified to see that Hamlet had to defend himself in earnest and that Laertes was threatening him with a terrific fire of thrusts. Groups of spectators formed around the fight, showing the rash facial expressions of real fear, and even the dead masses of extras became animated.

Then Rietschl saw how Laertes touched Hamlet's breast with a double thrust and then he slowly pulled the blade back, smiling. Hamlet collapsed, got back up, grabbed for his neck and fell back down. He reached with cramped fingers for the queen's dress and choking, rolled to the side.

"Curtain, curtain!" shouted the director, the theater doctor almost ran around Rietschl and pushed his way to the fallen man. While the director, standing in front of the curtain, spoke of a small, unfortunate accident to the restless murmur of the audience and asked them to leave the house in an orderly manner, the doctor examined the body of the victim.

Hamlet was dead.

“Laertes, Laertes… where is Hildemann?” the director shouted, and the police commissioner ran away to look for him. But Laertes had disappeared.

A letter carrier broke the circle of screaming women and silent men with a telegram for the director. It contained a strange message. The train on which Hildemann was to arrive for the evening’s performance had derailed halfway through its journey. There were two dead and several seriously injured. And as soon as the identity of the injured had been established at the next station, the station manager hurried to inform the management that Hildemann’s absence would be excused by his death.

The Shadow Player

It was on November 21, 1759, in the Battle of Maren, when the Prussian resistance began to weaken and the Austrian leaders were waiting for the surrender of General Finck. And it was one of the last Prussian cannonballs in this battle that tore off the right leg of the colonel of the Austrian regiment Lasey, Martin Johann Baron von Littrowsky. When the colonel woke up from his unconsciousness in the field hospital, the surgeon showed him his leg, which still had the riding boot on it, and it was a very strange feeling for him to see one part of his body so separated from the other. Then he learned that General Finck had surrendered with his regiments. And with a deep sigh the colonel fell back on his mattress, from which he had tried to get up in the momentary oblivion of his wound.

After his processing, the baron received a general retirement. But he went to Vienna, reported for an audience with his empress and put the retirement papers in her hands.

"Majesty," he said, "in this war whole men are needed. I am only half a man, and every hour would remind me that I lack something to serve Your Majesty as I would like. But if Your Majesty has a place somewhere in the civil service, I would dare to fill it. It is only in this way that I might withdraw from the field of battle..."

The empress laughed and promised the baron to see where she could find something for such a deserving man. And some time later the colonel received an appointment as an imperial judge in the capital of a province. The office of emperor's judge had once had its great importance, but now it had lost more and more of its functions to other offices, and it had not remained much more than a kind of supervision of certain branches of administration and justice. Nevertheless, this office gave its holder the opportunity to do good, and Baron von Littrowsky did not miss any of these opportunities. At the same time he had enough time to live his inclinations. If there was something that the baron had missed in his soldiering, it was the occupation with the earth. It gave him immense pleasure to see how things grew and ripened in the fields. And often, when he passed by germinating seeds with his regiment, he slowed down and finally stopped completely to lose himself in the sight of the growing seed. Often an unsoldierly regret came over him when the hard necessity of war forced

him to destroy the fields.

After his wounding, he would have preferred to retreat to one of his country estates and devote himself to cultivating his fields and tending his forest. But these wishes had to remain silent, for his empress was in need and it was his duty to serve her, if no longer in the field, then elsewhere, where he could be of some use to her. Not wanting to give up his favorite occupation, he bought an extensive garden near the city and spent all his free time turning this rather unkempt piece of land into a little paradise. With much taste he knew how to unite the French style with the English style in this garden and the alternation between representative dignity and graceful lightness was expressed to perfection in its layout.

The bachelor spent most of his evenings with the friendly family of Count Zierotin. The wife of the house was an excellent chess player and thus accommodated the other inclination of the baron, a predilection for this game, which was almost as great as that for horticulture. In the family of Count Zierotin, the colonel also got acquainted with a poor noblewoman, who spent half her time raising an orphan, and half as a governess for the children. When the housewife was prevented by other duties, Miss Sophie took her place at the chessboard, and the colonel did not hesitate to assure her that she was almost as knowledgeable about the game as the countess herself. But the woman won the baron’s favor when, during a visit with the count’s Family to his park, she openly showed her delight in the wonders of his empire. And when, encouraged by the owner, she pointed out the remarkable things in a few, but accurate and well-put words, and expressed her appreciation of the fine taste of the creator, the baron took her hand and asked her if she did not wish to command this garden.

Sophie was so frightened and in her trembling astonishment that Littrowsky was almost no less bewildered in front of her than she was in front of him. Two weeks later the city heard about the engagement of the emperor's judge to the young lady. And they were more than a little surprised, because the lord of the manor was already almost sixty years old and was a confirmed bachelor. Sophie, however, was very young, barely eighteen years old, and the unequal couple was considered a failure. There were more than a few voices that predicted that this marriage would not go well. But the prophets were wrong, because nothing of marital conflicts came to the public. The baron continued his previous life of seclusion, and his young wife showed no inclination to move in high society. They spent

their time tending the garden and playing chess, preferring the former in summer and the latter in winter.

After the marriage had lasted a year, the baron began to build in his garden. It was to be a fun pavilion, a charming, cozy home for the young woman, because she seemed to be a little sad. The little house that rose at the end of the garden was the delight of all who saw it. Surmounted by a roof broken in its lines, it turned its main front towards the garden, which rose in front of it to a terrace. The central part of the building bulged forward a little, and the side wings, which at first receded, then swept back, so that the whole was given a graceful cheerfulness. The cornices of the windows were decorated with stone garlands, from which hung clusters of fruit, and over the door was placed the coat of arms of the Baron of Littrowsky, a silver pole in a red field.

Inside there were several rooms furnished with all comfort, the most remarkable of which was the middle one. It had so many corners that it could almost be called round, and all the walls, from the floor to the ceiling, were embroidered with landscapes from distant lands. Mighty palm tree trunks formed the foreground, painted so vividly that one could really believe oneself in a forest. The wide panels, which had been given the strangest shapes by the painter's imagination, united on the ceiling to form a dense screen. And if you turned your eyes to the two windows, the light that came in through the glass panes really seemed to be dusk in a palm grove. But between the scaly tree trunks one looked out on the landscapes lying in the bright sunshine. There was the Sphinx of Giza and the pyramids, there was Jerusalem, seen from the Mount of Olives, the vast South American steppe, at the edge of which the Andes rose in the blue distance, the Sahara with an endless procession of camels, over their heads the deceptive mirage of the Fata Morgan, while in the foreground lay the bleached skeletons of animals and humans.

This Palm Room soon became the young woman's favorite place to stay. But even now the success expected by her husband did not materialize. She did not become more cheerful.

One day the emperor's judge once again inspected the stockade. From time to time he had to check whether everything was in order, whether the prisoners were sufficiently well kept and whether they were being treated according to the rules. Just as he had finished his inspection and was respectfully escorted to the gate by the officials, a newly arrived prisoner

was to be brought to the provost.

"Wait," said the Provost briefly, for he felt that, after all, it was well to remove his superior first before proceeding to official business. But the imperial judge insisted that the man be taken in at once in his presence. And so the Provost began to make the entry in his book, while the prisoner was examined by two guards to see if he had anything on him that he was not allowed to keep according to the regulations.

The new prisoner was a young man with lofty, dark eyes and hair of the same brown color. A straight nose and a bold mouth gave the face a harmonious perfection; an attractive openness spoke from his manner and from his answers. Without being insolent, he presented himself with complete impartiality, and it seemed as if he felt inwardly superior to all those people who had instant power over him. His name was Anton Kühnel and he was a shadow player by his trade.

"Shadow player!" asked the emperor's judge, "what kind of a trade is that?"

"A free art," Anton Kühnel replied, "to present to a laudable public all that has taken place since the creation of the world."

"There you probably say a bit too much. And where are your stage and your actors?"

"Here are my actors."

The lad raised two slender hands of the most beautiful construction. Narrow fingers, which showed their flexibility, spread before the eyes of the baron.

"And my stage? Any white wall is my stage."

He had immediately determined that the man who spoke to him was a higher official, and with the instinct of a free spirit he felt that it was not impossible to win his favor.

"So he throws shadow figures on the wall? A rare art, if it is well done! And why is he here? The baron asked the provost to hand him the passport of the boy, and from it he saw that the shadow player had to serve three days for vagrancy. While waiting for the baron's attention, Kühnel had hoped that the punishment could be waived by a word of power from the governor, and now he dared to ask:

"If Your Grace would be kind enough to give me ..."

"No, my dear, you will have to hum for three days. Nothing will help you."

The Provost and the guards laughed in the feeling of power.

"But," continued the baron, "when he has done his time, he can at least come to me and give me a sample of his art."

And, after giving the order to the provost to bring the man to his garden pavilion after his punishment, the emperor’s judge left the prison. He was quite satisfied with the coincidence that the shadow player had brought him. He had been looking for a distraction for Sophie for a long time, in order to counteract what seemed to him to be an ever-increasing change in her mind.

Sophie received his news with seeming indifference. But the baron laughed to himself; he wanted to make sure that the artist’s performances were quite funny and varied, and that his wife's laughter would give her new courage to face life. When Anton Kühnel was brought by the provost himself after three days, the baron immediately brought him before his wife.

"This is the man," he said, "who is able to perform everything that has happened since the creation of the world. But has he not forgotten his actors?” he laughed.

The lad raised his hands again as he had done then, and when the young woman looked up at the same moment, their eyes met. She looked him in the eyes with a quiet astonishment and then turned back to the fine embroidery that lay on her lap. She had looked forward to the visit without any particular expectation. She had felt the whim of her husband as she complied with all his wishes and regulations, without joy and often even with a quiet reluctance concealed from herself. Now, torn from her equanimity by this one look from the stranger, she felt an agonizing helplessness. She felt as if a strong hand had taken her from her ground, and she did not know when she would regain her composure. In the stranger's gaze she had read a wild and enthusiastic admiration and at the same time a desire that blazed in flames around her.

The baron had already had one of the rooms in the left wing of the pavilion arranged for the performance of the shadow player. From the one wall that offered the greatest flat surface to the play, all furniture had been removed, and when he now led Anton Kühnel into this room, the latter expressed his satisfaction with this "stage". But he asked that he be allowed to make a few more preparations, and then, after dark, he would perform his art for his highly favored audience, to what he hoped would be great satisfaction.

With a smile at the man's phrases, the baron left him, having ordered the servants to do his bidding. In the Palm Room, his wife's embroidery lay on the chair. She herself was no longer there and the baron went out into the park to look for her. Between two high Taurus walls in the French part of the garden he found her, in front of a marble group depicting Cupid and Psyche. The group was standing deep in a niche cut into the wall, the young, slender bodies in tender and yet delicate contact, as if the two were hiding here to avoid being seen by uninvited eyes.

"How do you like our guest?" he asked, quietly putting his arm in hers and taking his cane in the other hand.

Sophie turned reluctantly:

"You know that I am content in our solitude. Have I ever longed for a more pleasurable experience than that offered by the garden and the chess game! And now you bring a fairground performer into our house ... I think he still has the manner of the folk and the stench of the people he was with for three days."

The baron looked at his wife in amazement. He had never known her to have such an outburst and had never known that her pride in nobility was so strong.

Apologizing, he said, "I thought I was amusing you with such a demonstration." And, supported on her arm and on his cane, hobbling along beside her, he added soothingly: "We can send him away right away, if that is what you want. I'll give him some money and chase him out. He won't cause your displeasure."

But almost more vehemently than before, Sophie said, "No, no - you can't do that. He is already in the house. We can't chase him out right away ... poor man, he has his artistic ambitions. Now he'll have to stay."

"At least we will dismiss him right after the show."

Sophie made no reply; they walked on a narrow path over a beautiful, soft lawn in the English part of the park. The path was just wide enough for the two of them to walk side by side. With the coming of dusk, a mist fell, which became thicker and thicker, clinging to the branches of the trees. Slowly, the white layer sank onto the meadow, and Sophie, who was beginning to feel chilled, pulled her cashmere shawl tighter around her shoulders. When the baron noticed this, he also put his coat around her as if to protect her. But this made his limping stronger, and for the first time Sophie felt with unpleasant clarity that her husband was a cripple. On the

main path that ran straight through the park, one of the servants was waiting with the message that Kühnel was ready for the presentation.

In the room set aside for the performance, the shadow player received his guests with a deep bow and then escorted them to the armchairs provided for them. A large number of candles, whose light was united by a reflector placed behind them, were placed on a table. In front of the light source, a cloth was stretched across the room and, by its shadow, divided the wall in two parts. After Anton Kühnel had placed the baron and his wife in the chairs in such a way that they turned their backs to the light source and the cloth, he bowed again, first to Sophie and then to the imperial judge.

"My stage!" he said, pointing to the light part of the wall. Then he crawled away under the cloth and the performance began.

"The creation of the world," said the shadow player. Something monstrous, shapeless rose over the edge of the shadow into the light of the stage, like a pillar of smoke, which covered a figure, wandered back and forth and finally stopped, and it seemed to spin around itself. Then an enormous arm stretched out of it and described a commanding gesture toward the stage. And immediately the ground came alive at the feet of the figure. Clods of earth seemed to clump together, grow, rise up and, opening themselves, give birth to animals of all kinds, lions, horses, lambs, camels, peacocks, crocodiles, elephants. More and more creatures were called forth from the fertile ground of the shadow. Finally the towering figure disappeared and the stage was empty again.

"Very good!" the baron praised and leaned forward to read on his young wife's face what effect the lad's art were having on her. But Sophie sat without a sign of interest and looked straight ahead, toward the wall.

Anton Kühnel announced the second act.

"Adam and Eve! It was the creation of the first human beings, the life in paradise, the sin of the fall and the expulsion - all depicted by two skilful hands, using as decoration a few palm trees and animals that Kühnel had quickly cut out of paper. He had not been kidding when he said that he could show everything that had happened since the creation of the world. It really seemed as if all the stories since the beginning of time could gain shape through his shapes. Simplified to the utmost and yet true in all characteristics, the shadows of the strangest events passed over the stage. The most important things were expressed in sharp, clear outlines, and

Kühnel did his best when he had to juxtapose two people in a significant scene. Then his hands really seemed to do wonders, his dexterity came into its own; and the more the baron watched, the more he marveled at the lad's skill. Sophie did not seem charmed in the same way. While the baron did not stop with his praise, she would sit quietly and keep looking toward the stage, as if already waiting for the next act.

Anton Kühnel also presented the Flood and Noah's Ark, followed by the story of Jacob and his brothers, and after presenting Daniel in the pit, he moved on to the realm of history. One saw the quarrel between Romulus and Remus, Numa Pompilius and the nymph Egeria, Caesar's murder by Brutus and the other conspirators, of which each, sharply characterized, lunged toward the emperor. From the Greek history, Hector's farewell to Andromache came on the stage, then Perseus and Andromeda, the battle for the Golden Fleece and Medea's infanticide.

The performance had already lasted two hours without interruption, when Kühnel announced that he would now follow with the tragic story of Hero and Leander. The shadows of the two lovers stood sharply on the stage. Tentatively, Leander first approached the maiden, he backed away and disappeared. But then he came again, over the sea, went ashore, and Hero left her tower and hurried to meet him. There the two found themselves in a passionate kiss, the bodies approached each other, seemed to merge and nevertheless each kept its form. The shadows seemed to be animated by real life, driven by powerful passions, carried away by an irresistible storm. Here, in miniature, through the poor means of a shadow play, an image of heavy reality was given; life pleased itself in evoking in small, black figures an inkling of its power.

"Superb, really quite superb!" said the baron, "it is amazing what the fellow can do. And it is not at all funny, although it could so easily become funny."

Suddenly Sophie rose, without saying a word and went out. The baron sat in silence for awhile in astonishment and then turned to Kühnel. He had come out from behind his Spanish wall and was standing by the table with the candles, his eyes fixed on the door through which the woman had passed.

"Thunderation," said the baron at last, picking himself up with difficulty and limping out of the room. He found his wife in the palm room, sitting in the dark, her hands in her lap, and when the baron reached for

them, he found that they were holding the embroidery-work, as if the woman, unconscious of the darkness, had wanted to begin embroidering.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked anxiously, placing his walking stick against the wall and stroking her hair with his other hand.

"Nothing, nothing at all." The words were meek, as if they had difficulty penetrating the darkness.

I think something is wrong. Please tell me. Are you unhappy? I beg you to speak. You don't like the stories of these people! They upset you! I will dismiss him at once. But when the baron tried to get up from his bent posture, Sophie grabbed his arm and held him tightly.

"No." she said, "the poor devil, he has nothing to do with it. He and his shadow art - I find them more amusing than I expected. After all, he came to it quite innocently. It was only ... a momentary weakness, a malaise... Now it's over, it's completely over. Let's not talk about it anymore. I am completely alright. The man can't help it. He's an artist in his own way.

"Yes, he is an artist," said the baron more reassuredly, "he may justly be seen before high and very high lords....

He felt how Sophie's hand slowly slid along his arm and finally stayed on his hand to rest as if flattered, with an unaccustomed caress. This happened so rarely that it made him all soft and moved. He wanted to do something dear to his wife; he wanted to prove to her that he was grateful for her tenderness.

"Shall I tell the fellow to stay here a few more days?" he asked.

He could think of nothing better at the moment.

Sophie made no reply. The baron stroked her hair again, as if to encourage her to answer.

"Yes." replied the woman and her breathing became more rapid again, "tell him that he should stay."

The shadow player still stood in the middle of the room, at the candle-studded table, his gaze facing the door, just as the baron had left it. Some of the candles had already burned down to the glass cuffs of the candlesticks and were licking with restless red tongues for new fuel. One of the dying lights kept flickered greedily at the arm of the shadow player, who had put his hand on the table; but he did not notice the danger that threatened his only robe.

"Listen here," said the baron, "I would like to keep you here for a few more days. If it is alright with you, to not resume your vagabond life right

away.”

The shadow player looked at the baron, came too close to the flame with an involuntary movement and pulled back his scorched arm:

"I wonder if it will please the most high-born gracious lady that I use my weak strength for her amusement?” He asked his question very cautiously, as if groping.

"My wife is quite agreeable to it; there you can be quite without worry."

The expression on Kühnel's face was so completely different at that moment that the baron almost flinched. There came up suddenly, as if from the depths, with irresistible power, a glow of pride, a silent and cruel exultation, a hard certainty and brutal joy. But immediately this sudden flare-up had disappeared again, and with reverent bowing the shadow player said:

"Then I ask your grace to accept my thanks with the assurance that I know how to treasure this high honor.

So it happened that Anton Kühnel stayed in the house of the baron. His art was inexhaustible, and he always knew how to present something new and interesting. He also proved his special skill in drawing and cutting out silhouettes. Almost every evening his patrons gathered in the room where he gave his performances. And once Kühnel had made himself at home, he accompanied his performances with a script, which he skillfully knew to adapt to what was being portrayed, so that the baron and his wife were soon laughing heartily, soon moved to tears. Baron von Littrowsky had never had any special understanding for fine arts and literature; his fields were war, agriculture and chess. So it was not difficult to win his admiration with the unfamiliar, yet clever and witty ideas.

At first he resisted the influence Kühnel exerted against him, but when the fourteen days fixed for Kühnel’s stay came to an end, the baron said openly to Sophie:

“I don't know what I'm going to say. But I have almost grown fond of the fellow. It will be hard for me to miss him. He has something winning in his nature and he is a clever man.”

Even Sophie, who had been around the world of books more than her husband and possessed a finer judgment, admitted that Kühnel was an educated and obviously well-read man. This pleased the baron more than he wanted to admit to himself, and he now came out with the proposal to

extend the stay of the shadow player indefinitely.

"He brings life into the house! And when I am out, you will have someone around you to pass the time. He can give you lessons in drawing, as you have long wished to become proficient in this gentle art."

Anton Kühnel did not object to the baron's proposal and gratefully accepted all the conditions. It turned out that the now several-time shadow player was a former student who had run away from the university and was wandering the world in a mad rush for freedom. The baron was so grateful for the miracle that he had managed to capture this wild bird for himself. And he raised him even higher in his favor by using him as his private secretary, in a post for which he had long been looking for someone completely worthy of his trust. The shadow player, however, did not let his good fortune go to his head, he did not exalt himself, and never showed himself intrusive, so that the baron felt more and more that he had in this man a reliable servant and at the same time a good friend.

"A friend," he said, walking up and down the palm room, "a friend, I must call him that. For why should there not be a true friendship between a master and a subordinate like this? Is friendship only bound to the equality of a state? Nay, it is a divine power like love, and finds its way in, like the latter, without asking for office or rank."

Sophie, who was sitting at the window with her embroidery, inclined her head still deeper to her work, when the baron turned to her questioningly at his last words.

And you yourself," continued the imperial judge, "have you not become much happier and, it seems to me, healthier in these weeks? Yes, this young man spreads warmth around him that one cannot resist. How deeply he understands all questions of horticulture and agriculture. And his chess play - it is both solid and bold; I think he would have made an excellent commander, if it is true that from these qualities in the game one may conclude the same in earnest. One never knows what he wants, but before one knows it, one is surrounded by him and defeated. Have you not found this yourself? His game is irresistible... Sophie's answer was a while in coming...

"Certainly!" she said, turning her head and looking out into the garden, where Anton Kühnel had just come from the terrace, holding a large bouquet of blood-red roses that he had cut for the housewife. The baron was right. Sophie, who had earlier seemed to wither under a ghostly power,

blossomed anew. She was able to laugh again. She recovered to a second youth and took a lively part in all things again. If anything could have strengthened Anton Kühnel's already growing friendship with the baron, it was this brilliant effect on his wife. The drawing lessons gave Sophie immense pleasure, and Anton Kühnel also put his art at the service of her needlework. For the sake of his friend and his wife, the baron also turned his attention to these works and praised the draftsman's designs, which were then executed by Sophie in brightly colored silk on precious fabrics.

Even more than before, the baron felt the need to turn away from the world. He surrendered to social duties only to the extent that his position absolutely demanded it, and agreed with Sophie that it was far better in the close domestic circle, with Anton Kühnel between them as an imaginative narrator. When they went out to a party they were obliged to attend, or when the guests they sometimes had to invite left, they breathed a sigh of relief. And Kühnel was always ready, even in the middle of the night, to sit down with them and amuse them with a story or a sample of his skill.

But the world, which the baron thought he could neglect, was paying much more attention to him and his life than he knew. Behind his back a whisper arose at first, then a smile and finally laughter. There were probably some acquaintances who dared to allude to things that the people in his house thought were true. But the baron was so perfectly naive that he did not even understand what people meant and remained impervious to the little teasing jabs. Even the closest acquaintances could not think of proceeding with grave clarity, because one could remember that the otherwise so well-fitted imperial judge was always in the brightest rage when someone wanted to intrude into his affairs with good advice without being called in. And so the baron was spared from hearing a rumor that was spreading more and more. Of course, the world was satisfied that it could not harm his peace, claiming that the baron knew about the things that were going on around him and tolerated them silently.

After Anton Kühnel had lived in the house of the emperor's judge for two years, the baron took him hunting one day. It was a gloomy, foggy autumn day, and Sophie watched the horsemen with an anxious uneasiness as they passed through the courtyard. Once again Kühnel turned around, just as he rode through the courtyard gate, to greet the housewife standing on the steps of the courtyard stairs with her hat pulled low. On top of it, the street was covered with thick fog, so that it looked as if he was riding

straight into a heavy cloud. It was the last time Sophie saw the housemate alive.

A few hours later his body was brought home on a farm wagon. His body was lying on the straw, with a wound in his chest, and the straw on his left side was completely drenched with blood. A stray shot, one did not even know from whose rifle had hit him and killed him instantly. As the wagon slowly pulled into the yard, Sophie ran to the window. She saw the man on the farm wagon, saw the blood-soaked straw, and, without uttering a cry, collapsed at the window, as if by some magic her body had suddenly lost the support of the bones.

So the baron found her after some searching. He picked her up, called the servants, and with their help carried the still fainting woman into the boudoir, where he carefully laid her on the wide sofa. He himself was deeply shaken, his usually rosy face was ashen and his hands trembled as if he had suddenly aged twenty years. After half an hour, after the baron had tried in vain to awaken his wife with all sorts of cloths and essences, she came to. She slowly opened her eyes, and all at once she straightened up from the sofa, with such a look of horror on her face that the baron was startled.

"Yes, it is true," he said slowly, "there is nothing else. He is dead."

The doctor, who had been called and had just now come from the dead man to check on the woman, confirmed that Anton Kühnel was dead. The bullet had passed through his heart. The doctor prescribed a calming potion for the housewife, advised her not to take the matter too seriously, clasped her hand and left. And Sophie still had not spoken a word.

“So young…," the baron began again, "but so young! When it hits… but so young! And the terrible thing is that I don't know if it wasn't my bullet that hit him ..."

With a soft groan Sophie sank back and fainted for the second time. - Deepest grief enveloped the house of the baron like a gloomy veil. The baron had lost his friend and only now in the loss did he realize what this young man had been to him. He affirmed that the dead man had been superior to him in all things, and he silently evoked the memory of the artist and the man. Sophie almost never spoke of Kühnel, but it could happen that during a meal, when the baron spoke of his friend, she suddenly got up and went out. Her cheerfulness was gone, her bloom faded, she was sad and silent like a prisoner.

One evening - it was at the banquet of the estates on the occasion of the opening of the state parliament - when the baron was talking with Count Zierotin in memory of the departed friend, the count said after a short pause, during which he looked attentively into his glass filled with crimson muscatel "It is perhaps the best solution that could have been."

"The best solution? You speak strangely. There was nothing that had to be solved. It was a beautiful time and now all the joy at home has died."

"Well ... this friendship, Martin! It is ... you will forgive me, my war comrade! You always talk about a friendship between you and the shadow player. It is you, the imperial judge, Baron von Littrowsky, colonel of the Lasey regiment and a runaway student, a punished vagabond, a fairground comedian. It didn't really fit in with your position. And then the other I know that the evil tongues are always ready and that there is no truth in it, but nevertheless: with an honest evil will it could give the impression..."

It was of little use to the count that he had invoked his war comradeship with the baron. With a serious face, the emperor stood up and asked the count to follow him into an adjoining room. Here he demanded an explanation from him. And the count, who was angry because the baron was still showing his naivety, told him frankly everything that people were saying.

"I will give you all an answer," said the baron and ordered his sedan chair to be brought to the gate. "I must give them an answer," he kept muttering to himself.

And very soon the next morning he came into the bedroom of his wife, who was lying in the pillows, exhausted from a sleepless night, dull and pale. With careful words he repeated what the count had told him yesterday. But as carefully and tenderly as he spoke, the pale woman in bed burst into wild, convulsive weeping that made her emaciated body tremble. The baron hobbled desperately up and down the room, and when he no longer knew how to calm the woman, he began to hurl one thunderbolt after another at the loose mouthed with the most pithy soldier's curses...

"I will give them my answer. They should see that their vicious speeches do not reach us and that we are above all bluster and drivel."

And after some reflection the baron had found the answer. He combined the most beautiful silhouettes that Kühnel had cut into a tableau, gave his drawings and paintings precious frames and hung everything up in the palm room, which was thus transformed into a small museum. In the

narrow part of the garden, under a wide-branched linden tree, there was a small hill, and there was the favorite place of the dead man. He had spent many an hour there with Sophie, chatting and drawing. This place was now designated for the memorial of the deceased. There was a silhouette of Kühnel among the souvenirs that had remained for the lord. Sophie had drawn it according to her teacher's instructions, and the artist had received the master's full approval. This silhouette really showed the characteristic of Kühnel's head: the straight nose, the high, clear forehead, the full mouth and the powerful protruding chin.

The baron had the silhouette transferred to a strong board of precious wood colored like ivory and erected this monument on the little hill under the broad-branched linden tree. Kühnel's head was turned towards the pavilion; he looked into it boldly and a little smiling, with his slender neck rising from the open collar of his shirt. The winter had passed, and when the almost summery warm spring evenings allowed a stay outside, the baron invited all his acquaintances to a big garden party. They were amazed to see the museum in the palm room and the monument in the garden. And the baron did not hesitate to assure each and every one of them that he would not be sorry to do more for the memory of his dear friend. He was very stressed that evening, because the duties of the innkeeper were on him alone. Sophie had not been able to appear. She had become weaker and weaker and had been lying in bed in the city apartment for two weeks. When Count Zierotin left the pavilion among the last visitors, the baron held him back on the threshold of the palm room and pointed to the pictures hanging on the walls. "This is my answer, Andreas!" he said.

The count shrugged his shoulders and left.

All the rooms of the pavilion were open to the guests; only one room was closed to them. The room in which Anton Kühnel had performed his shadow plays had been kept locked since his death at the request of the Baroness. Everything was still exactly as Kühnel had left it that last evening. The cloth was stretched across the room, the candles on the table ... but the curtains were down, the tall door in white and gold was blocked - the room was silent and dead, like the man whose art had unfolded in this room.

The baron stood at the door to this room and looked through the rows of columns. Servants glided back and forth like shadows without a murmur, and from the small dining room came the fine clink of china and the bright

sound of silver. Now that the guests had gone, he first felt his tiredness, which he had hitherto known how to resist. So many hours of straining all the powers of body and mind, always on the lookout to meet a sharp word, a spiteful insinuation, lay behind him. It had been a battle that he had had to fight alone against all. Wouldn't they smile and laugh at him now on the way home? And - terrible thought - whether they had not in the end a right to laugh at him? Whether he was not really a trusting fool, doubly ridiculous in his efforts to prove to the entire world that he had no doubts about his wife and his friend? He felt that he was doing wrong by this thought, and he felt at the same time that he must not stay alone, because otherwise these thoughts would surely come back.

He was about to leave when he stopped after the first movement. It was as if he had heard a noise behind the door where he had been standing until now. Like footsteps across the room and then the moving of the table, just as Kühnel had moved his table before the performance began. Was someone in the room? The baron grasped the handle and pressed it down ... the door was locked. There was no one in there, it was impossible that anyone was in the room, so he must have been mistaken. When the baron came to this conclusion and laughingly prepared to leave for the second time, he was suddenly overcome by a terrible fear from an abyss beyond all logic. Quite unexpectedly, so that the baron did not even know how it had come. It was a feeling of uneasiness, but increased to horror. He was no longer master of this house, over himself and his fate. Someone else had taken all the power out of his hands and pushed him aside by grabbing him by the neck and throttling him until his breath ran out.

With a cry, the baron freed himself from this unbearable feeling and called a servant to him, on whom he leaned to help him to his sedan chair. He spent a restless night, filled with agonizing dreams.

In the morning his wife asked him to come to her. The baron thought that she looked very bad, and Sophie did not hide from him that she had also had a bad night.

"And how was the feast?" she asked, "What did the guests say?"

"Say? They didn't dare to say anything. But I don't know what they thought."

At this, the baron kept his gaze fixed on the woman's face. What was the cause of this mysterious illness by which Sophie was consumed? How blossoming and fresh she had been when Anton Kühnel had lived. And

strange that the decline had occurred at the same time as the death of the shadow player. As the baron continued to dwell on these thoughts, Sophie straightened up a bit in bed.

"I have a request," she said, "I don't feel comfortable here in the city apartment. After all, it's so nice out now. And I would like to look into the green. Let me be taken back to the Pavilion."

"Don't ask me to do that. You are not strong enough to be taken. It will hurt you."

The baron talked almost fearfully to his wife. The uneasy feeling that had overtaken him last night came back and took away his prudence.

"I beg you to fulfill my wish. Do you think I could get well here, when I am always longing for our garden? You should see how good it will do me."

"The doctors are against it, after all. And they're right, dear I fear, the memory that dominates the Pavilion upsets you too much. You'll only get sicker."

Then the baron saw tears in the eyes of the sick woman, and now it was impossible for him to resist her wishes any longer. He was ashamed of his doubts and treacherous thoughts, he found them abominable and low, and in the desire to right a wrong, he took Sophie's hand and kissed her. The doctors were very unhappy that Sophie was brought to the estate, but finally they had to agree, although they did not hide the fact that in their opinion the stay there could not be beneficial for the patient. The distrust of the baron, however, suspected hidden insinuations behind the resistance of the doctors, he believed to hear the spirit of the people in the simple and worried speeches and now he insisted that his wife's will be done. When he saw how happy she was, he was glad and began to hope again that perhaps, against the conviction of the doctors, natural instinct would prevail.

But Sophie's condition remained the same. She may have been somewhat more cheerful in her weakness, but at the same time her nature was dominated by a renunciation, as if she had given up trying to defend herself against an inevitable fate. In spite of all his love and care, the baron could not bear to be with the sick woman often and for a long time. This laughing resignation, this hard, blurred look of the blue eyes made him sick. And there was something else that drove him out of the house. Since the baron had transformed the pavilion into a temple of memory to the shadow player, it was as if a strange, mocking spirit had taken possession of the

once so secret rooms. The baron never felt quite at ease; even on the days when Sophie found herself willing to play a game of chess with him, there was no longer any real pleasure. The shadow that Sophie's emaciated hand cast over the bedspread and chessboard with every move frightened him. He had not wanted to admit it to himself for a long time, but at last he could not lie to himself any longer, it was like this: he was afraid of the shadows.

In the evening, when he was still walking along the park paths in the moonlight, and his shadow jumped in front of him when he turned around a bush, he was frightened and immediately turned around again. He could not bear to see his shadow running in front of him and preferred to return to the darkness. But when he discovered that this uneasiness was connected in some mysterious way, in deeper zones, with the loud talk of the people, he was determined to get rid of it. And he went to the park in the moonlight nights and stood in front of the monument of his friend to immerse himself in a devotional memory. He stayed in the palm room, where he looked at the individual pieces of the museum. But after such an exercise of his willpower, he was always doubly glad to leave the pavilion and the garden.

"You are neglecting me, my friend," Sophie said when he entered the sickroom one evening. And laughing, she continued: "I am a bad companion for you."

The baron pulled back the curtain and sat down on the chair next to the sick woman's bed. At that moment, he felt as if a shadow was slowly getting up from the chair. A tall, lean and transparent shadow. The baron was startled, but at the same moment he composed himself. He could not let the sick woman know of his irritability; he would never at any time refer to the fact that he had been a soldier in the past. With an apology and a complaint about the amount of work he had to do right now, he sat down beside the bed, and Sophie listened to him in silence for a while. Then, taking his hand, she said:

"Do you want to make me happy?"

"Certainly, how gladly!"

"I feel so good today. Accompany me to the palm room. There the view of the park is most pleasant."

"But you're not supposed to leave the bed. You are so weak. And the night air will harm you."

"No - no. We'll close the windows. Give me the pleasure."

After some coaxing, Sophie managed to persuade the baron to take her

to the palm room. He carefully wrapped her in warm blankets and hobbled along beside her with his arm around her shoulder. Then he moved one of the floral covered damask armchairs to the large glass table and prepared a seat for his wife. Sophie sat there and gazed out at the garden, while the gentleman entertained her by recounting all sorts of little incidents of the day. It was already quite late, and the servants, when they asked for the orders of the lord, were sent to bed.

The baron might have taken an hour to bring his spouse into a conversation, when he suddenly interrupted himself. It was as if he had heard a noise in the locked room next door. Like footsteps at that time, and then the sound of the table being moved. His arm fell as if paralyzed on the back of the armchair. What was that again? He bent over to look his spouse in the face. She kept her head bent forward, as if listening, and a serene happiness lay in the clear gaze of her eyes, averted from all earthly things. Never had the baron seen her thus.

"Did you hear it?" he asked hoarsely and hastily, touching her shoulder. Slowly the woman turned to him, "Hear ... hear what?"

"In there in that room ..."

Sophie shook her head, and the glow of happiness disappeared from her face. And she let the baron quickly wrap her in a blanket and lead her back to her room. When he had put her to bed, he left the house and spent the whole night in a circle of aristocrats that used to gather at the state capital to play and drink. For a few days he only came to the pavilion for a short time, inquired about the condition of his wife and left the sick room after a small attempt to start a harmless conversation. People in the city were more than a little surprised that the emperor's judge found the time and inclination to spend time in the society in which he was otherwise so seldom seen, especially now, during his wife's illness. More acute observers, however, noticed the hurried gaiety that characterized the baron's character. Simultaneously with this appearance came the news that his wife's health had deteriorated considerably, and the warmest sympathy was shown to the man who, according to general opinion, only wanted to deaden his despair. About a week after the evening in the palm room, the attendant who was on duty at Sophie's bed came to meet the baron on the threshold of the sickroom. She put her finger to her mouth and asked the baron to be careful, because the woman, who had spent a bad night, now seemed to be slumbering.

Cautiously the baron approached the bed and was about to remove the curtain, when the folds were thrown back, even before he had touched them. It was as if a shadow stepped out and slid past him. A gaunt shadow, but no longer as vague as the first time, but firmer and harder in outline. The shadow floated past the baron and disappeared into the deep twilight of the background. At the first moment the baron had stretched out his hand to the apparition, now he stood horrified and stared into the darkness of the room, where the glimmer of the night light could not penetrate. Only after a while did he dare to pull back the curtain. There lay the woman in her bed, with a happy smile on her face. She had closed her eyes and seemed to be asleep. Slowly, the baron let the curtain slip from his hand and quietly left the room. That night he did not seek out the company of his peers, but spent it in a tavern with all sorts of traveling folk who had just arrived in town at fair time and whom he incited to the wildest and most boisterous merriment by generous donations.

As morning approached, one of the travelers, a knife swallower and magician, regretted that the festival would now come to an end. But the baron banged his fist on the table and shouted:

"Why should this feast be over? There is no way we will get together again so young. That's why we want to stay together until the day comes to an end. All the fair people cheered and celebrated the patron with all kinds of displays and noise, and the baron sat among them and drank and partied until he thought he had overcome the paralyzing feeling of horror. It was late in the evening when, swaying a little, he rose from the midst of his drinking companions. A murmur of regret went through the people, who had become drunk and sober a few times during the day.

"You still want to stay with me?" asked the baron.

"Yes! Yes!" they shouted from all sides.

"Well then, forward! Everyone come along".

A tremendous commotion arose, and two prize-wrestlers lifted the baron on their arms and carried him around amid the shouting of the others. Then they all moved out, the baron in front, accompanied by the owner of a puppet theater on the left and a snake lady on the right. The few people who were still on the street at that time saw with no small astonishment the emperor's judge at the head of a procession of circus people. At first, amidst laughter and singing, the procession moved quickly forward, but the closer the baron came to his garden, the more he slowed down his pace.

Brought to himself by the cool night air, he began to deliberate, pretending, in order to gain time, so that he was not making much progress. It was impossible to take this whole roaring horde into his house. He had to try to cope alone with the fear, which began to increase the closer he came to his goal. And it was now time to get rid of the crowd of his companions in a good manner. When he reached the perimeter wall of his park, he turned around and shouted to the whole gang:

"Children, I can't do it! I can't take you with me. With my wife's illness, it is not acceptable for me to bring such noisy company into her house. But tomorrow...!"

But the travelers would not hear of it. The baron had dragged them out of the city and now they should turn back? And when the baron explained once again that they had to go home, they began to grumble and surrounded the patron in an almost threatening manner. But then the baron leaned against the wall of his park and shouted:

"Now you will immediately obey the order, riffraff! Otherwise I'll break all your heads in two." And threateningly he raised his walking stick in his right fist. They did not dare to contradict him any further, backed away from him and finally slunk away, like dogs threatened with the throwing of a stone.

Breathing a sigh of relief, the baron continued on his way. But his companions had hardly left him when he was again seized by the uneasiness and anxiety that always seemed to await him here. He stopped and was about to call out to those who had been driven away to return. Then he wondered whether it would not be better to turn back and spend the night in his townhouse. But now he remembered his duty. He had not inquired about his wife's condition for an entire day, although he was aware of the seriousness of her condition. It was at least necessary to get news of her condition, and then he could leave the pavilion again. And so he hobbled along the park wall towards the entrance. Suddenly he was startled. The moon had come out from behind a cloud and cast the baron's shadow on the white-washed wall. The silhouette was sharp, as if conjured by the hand of Kühnel, and the sudden memory of the dead man made the baron stop with a jerk. Then he continued on his way all the faster, keeping his head turned away from the wall so as not to see his silent companion.

From the gatekeeper the baron learned that his wife had been unconscious for most of the day, and it was obvious to the old man that he

had given up hope of seeing his mistress alive. Quietly the baron entered the palm room and was about to go into the adjoining room, through which one came to the sick room, when he heard a light step coming towards him. He stepped back, and at that moment a man passed in front of him, shadowy but of a distinct shape. And when the baron took a close look at him, he thought he recognized the face and posture of Anton Kühnel. The man walked across the palm room toward the closed door of the sacred room, opened it and entered. There came a desperate courage over the baron, which was stronger than his horror. He rushed to the door and tore at the handle - the door was locked. Groaning the baron gave up in his effort and limped, as fast as he could, out into the garden. He was crazy. He was undoubtedly mad. And pursued by his horror, he ran around in the garden, senselessly, without knowing what he was fleeing from and to where.

Suddenly something held him. Some perception bored into him, penetrated him like a glowing iron and finally reached his consciousness. He got control of himself again and saw that he was standing in front of the monument of the shadow player. The moon was already so high that it fully illuminated the little hedgehog and the board. But ... the baron stood frozen and it was as if some force was pulling off his scalp - the board was smooth and empty - the silhouette of Kühnel was gone.

With clenched teeth, the baron turned away. He walked up the main path of the park toward the pavilion and needed all his willpower not to scream in horror. A glow of light came to him from among the trees there, and the baron was astonished, for the house had been silent and gloomy when he had left it. As he approached, he saw that the glow came from the locked room, and in a desperate determination to savor all the horror that this night had in store for him, he crept over to the terrace, in front of the lighted windows. The curtains were down as usual, and inside it were bright enough to cast a strange shadow play on the screen. And there it emerged from the memory of the baron. It was the play of Hero and Leander, as Kühnel had performed it on the very first evening. Only the shadows filled the entire window frame. The bodies pressed against each other and united in a wild kiss. Swept away by powerful passions, by an irresistible storm, the two lovers found themselves in a frenzied embrace. And the baron recognized both: it was his wife and the shadow player.

Then the baron climbed up the stairs and tore at the closed door. It opened and he saw the entire room. Sophie was all alone. She stood in the

middle of the room, in the robe in which she lay in bed, motionless and her eyes closed. On Kühnel's table all the candles were burning. The baron ran up to the woman and grabbed her shoulder.

“So you have betrayed me, betrayed me...!" he shouted.

Sophie made no reply, opened her eyes a little and then fell heavily against his chest. Frightened, he embraced her and brought her slowly, half carried, half guided to her room. The waitress was asleep in her armchair and awoke only when the baron had already brought the woman into bed. The baron took one more look at Sophie's face, a fine, withered face, but one with a happy smile.

Then he went out. He went into his room, where he had decorated an entire wall with weapons. Slowly he took down a riding pistol and loaded it carefully. He didn't know what he was doing it for or why he was going out into the park with the loaded pistol. Something drove him and guided him. And then, all of a sudden, he was standing in front of Anton Kühnel's monument again. There was the silhouette once more on the board ... it was clearly there again, had returned; and the baron felt a smile on his lips, like an evil compulsion. Slowly, with a sure hand, he raised the pistol and aimed it at the silhouette's chest. "You shall not leave here, my

Friend!” he whispered, "never again...”

The shot cracked and the baron approached the monument like any other target to examine it. He had hit it well. The bullet sailed straight to where the heart of the living man had been.

When the baron returned to the sickroom, the waitress stood bent over Sophie's bed. When he entered, she rose and said softly:

“She is dead!”

The baron sold his properties in the city, resigned from his office and retired to his old estate. But he no longer enjoyed farming and did not want to know anything about chess. His mind was in a state of disarray and after a short time his strength began to deteriorate.

In the park of the baron, which the State Parliament had purchased, they tried to establish a beekeeping colony. But the bees had no desire to thrive...

Busi-Busi

“Germany ... ah, Germany," said the corporal and spat out contemptuously. "The Germans ... they are not people like us or you .... No! They are a kind of monkey who live in the trees. Some have also nested in the swamps, of which half of Germany is covered. There they have burrowed in, like hippos, so that only their heads stick out. They eat their own garbage, by God, there is no such filthy tribe left in the whole world. Your sons may be proud that they may help us to drive out this pest. And when we then invade Germany, they can take what suits them. These pigs have women with white skin and long blond hair, which you wrap around your fist ... ha ... they won't be treated nice."

Gotomoro's black face oozed with grease and grinned, he wiggled his scalp in delight so that the thick white fur of hair was soon at the nape of his neck and soon at the front of his forehead. His loins made a short, jerking motion. The shells, animal teeth, and sacred stones that hung from his magic belt on long strings clinked softly. He did not object to the young men of the brave Busi-Busi entering the warpath to cut the necks of the Germans. He blinked slyly, his fat grin frozen into a grimace; he had a vision of slashed steaming bodies, of twitching exposed strands of muscle, of nerves, the thin white threads pulled out of flesh to be reeled onto pointed sticks, of all the beautiful things that, since they were forbidden by the French, could only be done in secret.

Gotomoro was the greatest magician in the forests of upper Senegal and in the villages of the Busi-Busi. His skin was cracked like the bark of a tree, his legs and arms were fleshless and bent by time, for he was ancient, and it was said that he could not die at all. He made rain and drought, struck the cattle of the neighbors with the blood disease or rotary disease, the people with stiff neck, sleeping sickness or beri-beri, he was an evil wild beast in Negro guise, and even the whites feared him since the former governor, who had once punished Gotomoro for slaughtering a ten-year-old girl, had been stricken with leprosy.

Gotomoro sent notched staffs to the villages, and half a thousand young people became recruits of the glorious Republic of France. Gotomoro assured them that they could not wait to be led against the wretched Germans. By the way, he received one franc for each recruit. The Busi-Busi

warriors had to shave off their high hair bulges, which were artfully held together with cow dung and tree resin, and wear caps on their bald skulls and soldiers' uniforms. They learned to drill and shoot, and when they were ready for the battlefield, they were to be packed into the belly of a ship that lay in the harbor. But then they declared that they would by no means embark on this campaign without Gotomoro, because his participation alone would guarantee victory; he was in possession of the Baktatu pills, which had to be swallowed before the battle in order to avoid death altogether, or else to pass immediately from this threshold into the land of eternal bread.

There was nothing left but to bring Gotomoro, also to put him in a uniform and to take him to Europe.

Of the last hours of the battle for the village, Vice Sergeant Cornelius Zimmergesell, once a thousand years ago a lawyer and a member of the fraternity Hilaria, did not retain a single memory. It was an indistinguishable roar of heaven and earth. Howling of fire-breathing demons, the splintering crash of the world framework, the neighing and stamping of the shell beasts. He lay half buried by the wreckage of his machine gun, the last of the whole crew, burning beams had fallen, the sucking leech on his right shoulder was a gunshot, hanging from his foot half shattered by a piece of stable wall was a dead man, that dying, had bitten into his shoe.

Black faces flitted in the first shadows of unconsciousness, so the French had also used Africans against the village ... One of the faces was suddenly painfully close, two wheels of eyes circled, someone tugged at Zimmermann's right arm. Pain stabbed furiously through the still bright remains of his humanity, he heard someone roar, and then everything plunged into a dark well.

Then there were sparks that slipped into the timeless and bound themselves into sheaves, clumps of flames, fires. Zimmergesell’s sight opened into a dimmed narrow field of vision, at first his eyes only addressed certain things, these were bonfires, one, two, three, small crackling sparks rose from the wood. Rubble was illuminated red, fractured house walls, black-rimmed, grimy windows, suddenly he saw very clearly the uncountable pockmarks in the mortar, the wound pits of the swarms of bullets. Black Frenchmen bent around the fires, and the shadows stretched and bent, phantoms stripped of all human masks. Zimmergesell lay

sideways on the ground, the scrawny, kicking Gaiter legs in front of him were more important than the bodies and heads, he suddenly became afraid they might start a St. Vitus dance in a fit of frenzy and trample him.

A bridge of shadows fell on him from the fire, a man stepped over it, and in doing so it disappeared piece by piece behind him. A horrible black face with fat dripping wrinkles and a white wool tangle over the forehead breathed a disgusting smell into his lungs.

"Ha!" bleated the nightmare, jabbing his black thumb into the corner of his eye so that his eyeball nearly popped out of its socket. A hissing whistle caused the men at the fires to sit up and run at a dog trot, crowding around the prisoner, stomping, slapping their thighs and neighing.

In spite of all the pain, Zimmergesell thought he could put an end to everything by suddenly rushing forward, disregarding his bondage, and tearing a piece of flesh from the legs of one of the Negroes with his teeth. They would then cut him down and everything would be over. But for heaven's sake there had to be a white officer or sergeant somewhere who could take care of him and stop the mockery of another white man, a man of his own race.

Zimmergesell craned his heavy head upward; lifted his eyes from the tangle of trampling, stamping legs to the heads. Between the black woolen skulls was, distant, over the bouncing shoulders the glimmer of a white face.

"Comrade," said the wounded man, "do free me." Do the French let their prisoners be kicked and defiled by Negroes?"

No answer came, the Negroes neighed with laughter, and they were immensely amused. The old man jabbed his black index finger against a uniform button on his chest:

"Nix white comrade! Only black comrade! Good black comrade of good German man."

There was again through the rearing up the distant gleam of a white face, but it was washed away and carried away in an instant by the chattering, seething surge that now ran back against the fires. There they all sat down in a circle as if in consultation, the flames glowing on the black faces, cutting smooth bronze foreheads, dull bronze noses, and savage animal chins of bronze out of lumps of coal.

Cornelius Zimmergesell, German student and vice sergeant, squirmed weakly in the ropes that bound him to a beam. The ground beneath him

moved in waves, sometimes he flew up high on a swing, the faces and fires gently arcing by. He thought of throwing himself headlong from the massive swinging box and taking one more, at least one with him. Then he forced himself to stand still, tearing at himself like a drunkard who suddenly realizes he is in danger and wants to sober up.

The terrible man, that old man with the white hair and the unbearable smell, hopped on bended knees between the fires around a plump, dark mass. Zimmergesell saw four horse legs stretched out jagged and cadaver stiff, the belly was open, intestines spilled out, green and yellow, a blackish-purple cake, the liver perhaps. Now the old man danced in his frog position in the cavity of the horse's body, suddenly drove with both arms deep into the interior. And while he thus, with arms sunk to the shoulders, tore loose lumps of kidney fat, Zimmergesell saw the rigid horse's legs cramp together and beat languidly and aimlessly in the air with a remnant of hellishly tortured life.

That tattered and rumpled body was still alive....

Suddenly someone whispered at the German's wounded shoulder, across the beam to which he was tied.

"Take this knife," someone said in French, "I don’t know what they have in mind for you. Escape ... or, if you can't, kill yourself."

A white face rose above the beam, the face of a woman. Sad eyes under a brow with a curtain of fringe, shame had marked the cheeks, unspeakable humiliation had poisoned the broad lips. "What are you doing here?" asked the German, horrified. "Are you one of them there?"

She did not answer, slipping a knife handle between his fingers.

"I can't," he gasped, "cut the ropes. My hands are frozen."

The edge crunched in the tightly stretched hemp, Zimmergesell glanced at the tangle of hair on the woman's neck, a broken tortoiseshell comb lifting tresses into knots. All at once the stench of the wilderness wafted in, a black fist drove for her neck, clasped her throat. The woman screamed, was shaken, lifted, and in the scrawny arms of the Negro she hung above the ground like a dog grabbed by the scuff of the neck. She was flung somewhere, whooping the black soldiers grabbed at her.

The fat from the horse’s belly ran down from the old man's face. Whitish lumps stuck in the bark of his skin. Zimmergesell saw himself lifted up and placed on his feet, swinging, he stood, legs buckling, in a circle of flickering fire. And always that terrible face burned and captivated

with a ferocity from humanity's roots. It is possible that they will slaughter me and eat me, he said to himself.

Suddenly the broad, flat hand of the Negro ran from the top of his head over his forehead, eyes, nose and mouth, as if he were rubbing a soft substance over his face.

It was like a mask, which was put over his head, a soft mask, swelling into other shapes. Still the Negro stroked in such a way that the mask nestled itself more closely to his skin. And while Zimmergesell withstood this stroke in a kind of torpor, he suddenly realized with horror that he no longer felt any disgust from the stench that the Negro emitted. He sucked in that dung-scent of rancid fat, of sweat and filth, that breath of vice and vileness with a sense of abandon.

This sudden realization was so ghastly that a cry burst from the depths of his soul not yet contaminated by the ghastly Negro. -

What he heard was a kind of grunt, not a human cry.... the agonizing sound of an animal with no power of speech. He raised his legs to follow the advancing Negro, they stamped heavily on the ground, with a wagging head, from which protruded a snuffling, smacking snout, he groped behind his master.

Yes, that was it, he had suddenly recognized in the Negro his master, who had command over him, to whom he was at the mercy of life and death. But in a part of his humanity that had not yet been raped, something resisted this terrible transformation. He desperately defended this remnant, which was an inner effort that almost broke him in two, for the Negro was very powerful in him.

In the meantime, he trudged after the old man into the circle of fires as an unfeeling human animal, ignorant of his appearance, as a kind of monster. The flames wrote lambent letters of fire into the night, he was afraid of them, looking at this red, bright thing with fearful amazement. They lived, those slender tufts bit when you got close to them. He drew up his legs and made a few awkward leaps of fear, over which a roar of laughter rose. His little slanted eyes showed him, next to the red tufts of snakes, before which one had to beware, only an unrecognizable tangle of shadows. All the more his nose told him, it told him the smell of many masters, one of which was the supreme, a god to whom one was devoted. A large animal body smelled very tasty, which lay there with open belly and rigidly stretched out legs. And then, from afar, from a corner of the

courtyard, there was a smell composed of many things, and the breath of a white woman...

Sometimes his terrified soul would strike again against this paralyzing devotion, it seemed to want to break out of its precincts and free itself, be it to death. But it was walled in on all sides, flew against the dull walls like a spring wind that wants to blow away a mountain, and then sank again into the darkness, exhausted, battered and despairing.

A muffled sound crammed the ear of the unfortunate. At the same time it hummed along, and formed itself into pieces. And in addition there was a hissing and fluttering as of a flock of flapping birds. It was a swarm of countless hands beating into each other, row upon row of hands of soldiers sitting there, and the god with the white hair standing and beating with fingertips and wrists on a drum made of stretched skin. The humming and clapping matched each other and were beautiful.

A feeling of well-being flowed through the plodding heaviness of the man-beast, lifting his legs off the ground, the music was a grinding grating joy and forced restlessness into the bones and muscles. Limbs twitched, arms flaunted heavily at shoulder height.

Slowly, like an animal awakened from hibernation, Cornelius began to dance. He danced in his twilight consciousness, sometimes burned wildly by a lingering glow of reason and memory, and he spun among the fires. He might have bellowed with shame and indignation, and danced, and the music was to this plump tower of flesh and this decomposed brain a blissful comfort, like a warm swamp.

What kind of animal was he? He knew nothing of himself, had only a feeling as if he wore a very thick hairy winter shirt, he heard himself snorting, sometimes white flakes of foam fell from his mouth, his shadow drifted among the many fires, so that he could not get hold of it. Only a clumsy body occasionally glided forward in the shadow play as a clearer image, a human form coarsened beyond recognition.

Despite the horrible agony it caused him to measure his terrible transformation and its distance from his being, he did not want to give up the last remnant of his clarity. Like a corrosive acid, that poor blessed drop of spirit was still in him; he felt it, as if shaken in a bottle, blazing and burning in groaning walls of flesh. The animal twilight lay vaguely beckoning, there the split of the human into two would be extinguished, wholesome spiritual blindness would be covered by deep, soft shadows. But

he did not give himself up completely; for then the return was barred, and strangely, in this utmost torment, on the threshold of humanity, there was still a distant tremor of hope.

Gotomoro swung the hand drum, and grinned imperiously:

"We will make pills out of you ... Your fat is good against your bullets."

Howling, the Negro soldiers chanted time with the drumbeat and hand claps, this was the dance of death that now began. Pointed sticks, and bayonets stabbed into the fur of the dancing man, straps struck him around the thighs, and they began to pelt him with stones and clods of earth. He shook his head, swayed grunting and could not free himself from the beat that kept his limbs twitching and jerking. Suddenly he felt a noose go around his neck and tighten. His throat was tight, he ran out of air, his mighty lungs burst with gasps, black worms slid through his head. With raised paws he blindly attacked someone, fear of death broke the compulsion to obey, and he struck out wildly, choked on the rope and fell down on all fours.

Roaring, howling and gasping, he was dragged. He rolled on the ground, bit at shadows, reared up, and always found himself overpowered. A narrow, long opening, a hollowed-out tree, a well trough ... with all four limbs stretched across the opening ... Gotomoro stood splayed, a flint knife cutting magic circles across his body ...

To die as an animal! ... To die as an animal! ...

He cried out, completely from the depth of his death-anxiety, and it was a human cry ... But it had hardly escaped his mouth, when a much louder and wilder roar answered in the courtyard, earth and stones lifted to a black funnel, bursting lava sprang in crashing fountains of fire against the walls. Gotomoro sank away, running and shouting and plunged into a long downward passage, swelled swiftly away, departed into a yellow haze, leaving the bound man alone, who remained on the softly swaying trough...

Bavarian hunters, who had retaken the village from the enemy in a counterattack during the night, found a severely wounded comrade in the yard of a farmhouse.

He was unconscious and lay in the hospital for two weeks in a fever. When he came to his senses again, he told once, hesitantly and shaken by horror, how he had been turned into an animal by Negroes. He seemed to have thought that the story, which of course was only the beginning of his wild, life-destroying delirium dreams, was a real experience. The

regimental doctor told him this lovingly and emphatically, and Zimmergesell never told the story again.

The Forest of Augustowo

We, five Storm Troopers, had gotten separated from the rest of our troops in the forest of Augustowo near a swamp. The others went around to the left, we went around to the right, simply, over some tree trunks lying there ... that's how it happened.

Luftschütz led the way, balancing over the snowy, slippery logs, flapping his arms like wings, cawing and hopping like a crow. He was a funny fellow.

Two hands with cramped fingers protruded from a gray-green pool between broken ice floes. Someone had sunken in there. But you couldn't tell from the hands whether it was one of ours or a Russian. Yellow, thin, rotten marsh grass was matted with snow like dead man's hair with clods of earth.

Then we made our great find. A heavy trail stretched through the snow, the forest was rumpled and trampled, and we noticed that the trees were notched. We followed the trail a little way and came to a hollow whose edges were all crushed around and around. The thick ice cover of the water was shattered, and pointedly staring at the shards it didn't take any special acumen to guess that the Russians had probably sunk one of their big guns, or even several of them, to hide them from us. Karl Sammt took off his coat and shirt, lay down on his stomach and reached with his naked arm into the black water, which was already covered with a thin layer of ice. If this was not the big flute on which the Russian victory reports were blown, he said, it could very well be a gun barrel.

We were glad that we had figured out the Russians retreat, and Simonides gave each of us a sip from his cognac bottle. Then he left with Karl Sammt to make the report, and the other three of us stayed behind so that our birds would not be taken from us.

Robert Eckler welcomed the rest. His heart was giving out. He was an elderly man and as a clerk for a lawyer had all too suddenly gone from sitting to running, and what a way to run! He lay down in the snow like a winter hare. Lustschütz told jokes.

It was a good three hours before our comrades returned. They were restless and reported that they had not been able to discover a single trace of our people despite the most diligent search. Luftschütz was a little angry,

now they had missed three hours and there was not much left of the day, and all they had had to do was follow their own tracks to find the right way. Karl Sammt made a grumpy face and crouched down in the snow. If he understood it so well, he should try it himself. They would come to a place where the forest was trampled in all directions and someone needed to know his way around.

Without a word Luftschütz packed his rifle and strode into the snow. I followed him. But we also searched in vain, it happened just as our comrades had said. The guys in the trees led to a witch's dance of tracks, from which none could be determined with certainty as the right one. We followed the most probable one. Three Russians lay in the blood-reddened snow. But they were dead and could give no information. It was dangerous to shout or shoot loudly, because the Russians could be lured in just as easily as ours. The whole forest was full of scattered Russians. We spent the night huddled together in a snow hut that we had built under the roof of a giant spruce. One of us was always on guard, because we could hear howling, at times up close, then even closer, and we did not doubt that in this endless winter forest wolves were doing their thing.

In the morning we saw that snow had fallen overnight. So much snow had fallen that it covered all the tracks and put us in a whole new and seemingly un-tried world.

We let guns be guns; the main thing now was to catch up with our people if we didn't want to perish in this wilderness. We consumed half of our icy rations and set off, telling ourselves that it was best not to search around much, once here and once there, but to stay in one direction until we could follow certain signs of the proximity of people. During the first hours of the arduous march, we were still making notches in the trees with our spades, so that later we could find the way back to the sunken guns. Then we had to give it up, because it took us too long, and we had to try to put an end to the marching in snow as soon as possible because of the completely exhausted Eckler.

The poor devil stopped us every ten minutes in a fit of respiratory distress, wheezing piteously, sank down a few times in dizziness, then stumbled on again, and so the day passed with small rests and forward lunges before we had even the slightest clue for our way. In the process, this terrible forest became wilder and wilder, and with the many twists and turns around swamps and impenetrable undergrowth, in the even gray of the

sunless day, we no longer knew whether we were still holding to our first direction. Finally, Eckler became so bad that we had to drag him. Once Simonides fell up to his chest in a water hole, which was treacherously hidden under the snow. Perhaps there were warm springs in this forest that prevented freezing. Fortunately, we were able to use our rifles to make a scaffold on which he could help himself out. His uniform stuck to his body, crackling stiffly after half an hour; he complained that the frozen folds were shriveling his joints.

We ate the rest of our canned food. After this rest, Eckler refused to go further. Simonides showed us the coin sized sore rubbed areas on his ankles, knees and between his legs. We had to push them on almost by force. Snow came down in big soft flakes between the overloaded branches.

In a ravine between two waves of hills, we noticed an old oak tree with a chalice and a Russian double cross carved into its trunk in a most crude manner. This must have been done many years ago, for the carving was distorted by the growth of the tree and many folds of bark ran around it. Nearby was a small cawing and wing-beating throng. Crows were squabbling over some grub. We saw a hideously twisted lump of entrails, heart, liver and lungs, knotted by the pale bluish strands of intestines.

Luftschütz, who as a butcher possessed an expert eye for such internal matters, seemed to want to say something. But he repressed it down by shaking his head, saying only that there must be wolves here.

Since things were not going well with Eckler at all, Luftschütz and I had to push our rifles under his arms on the left and right side to support him. He was now hanging on this kind of stretcher, dragging his legs and gradually becoming heavier and heavier. Karl Sammt led the way. Behind us Simonides limped and groaned with every step.

We felt that it could not go on like this for long. Around five o'clock the flakes were driven into a wilder dance. The storm hissed into the thick forest, from which no cloth or woolen shirt could help. It drove at our ribs and ate greedily at our faces and hands. The trees shook off their snow loads, and knocked down whoever it hit.

Luftschütz thought that the Russian winter would be all too merciful to us and that we could slowly get ready for the last roll call. The sweat froze on our foreheads in the icy storm; around our noses and in our beards sat the strangest cone formations, under which the skin stretched painfully.

Karl Sammt turned, his ears standing out white and rigid from his

cheeks. Ahead in the twilight was a hut. We staggered on, the forest gave way to a small clearing, something dark was stuck there in the snow, between the blasts of the storm a spark of light twitched, and then became a steady beam. Snow clutched at us, sucked out our last strength, the storm tossed us back and forth. We had to lean against the wall as we rapped the soldier's salute on the door with the butt. Something grunted, a black, broad behemoth pushed heavily into the door. Luftschütz and I held our rifles at the ready; there was no way of knowing whether there were Russians in the house. Karl Sammt, who had picked up a few Polish words as a waiter in Posen, choked out something tongue-twisting about night and soldiers and shelter.

The behemoth grunted and folded its arms across its chest, as sentries do to keep warm. Since it seemed unwilling to leave the threshold, Karl Sammt poked him in the side with the butt. It was like the blow of a walking stick against a bear. The human only growled and straightened up higher. An arm from within pushed him aside. He gave way to a female who stepped forward and eyed us.

Karl Sammt let go with his Polish eloquence. Night. Soldiers. Snow. Shelter. Good German soldiers. Do nothing! Just sleep! He put his right cheek on the two folded hands, made the face of a sleeping angel. She let him talk for a while, then nodded and stepped back.

We had a roof over our heads, a fire on the stove, a lamp, and maybe food. Eckler immediately fell on a pile of rags in a corner and remained moaning and gasping. Our lungs, which the storm had blown full of fresh, cold air, breathed heavily and depressed. There was a smell of smoke that the windswept wind whirled back down the chimney, and all the evils of human food and digestion. The two tiny windows were stuck shut with moss and clay and for many years the air inside must have only been refreshed when opening the door.

Simonides took off his upper and lower garments without any trouble and without considering the mistress of this forest palace began to rub his sore spots. The black monster squatted on a chopping block in the darkest corner and gazed motionlessly at Simonides' legs. Karl Sammt continued to try his hand at Polish. Now it was time to eat. Good German soldier! Hunger! He bared his teeth, stuck his index finger in his mouth, bit down on it, went hamm! hamm!

The woman listened to him laughing. She wore a ragged blouse, its

former red buried under a layer of dirt. The skirt hung in dirt-heavy folds down to her heels, with shapeless shoes she stepped onto the ragged edge. Left and right on both hips reflected two large stains where she used to wipe her hands from work. She was not old enough to be quite ugly. Rough cheekbones stretched her face wide; the pale skin was heavily pockmarked. The eyes looked bold and lustful. The adventurous Simplicissimus of Grimmelshausen was in my mind. This is what the female camp followers who marched with the armies in the Thirty Years' War must have looked like.

When Karl Sammt had finished his speech, she pointed out that there was nothing, no bread, no cheese, no milk, nothing, nothing at all. She spoke slowly and with a heavy tongue, the loneliness of the forest and being with the black monster had made her speech clumsy.

Luftschütz grumbled, "Let's not make a fuss. You must have something to eat. Even the Russians can't live on air."

And he began to search everything, poking around in all the corners, spearing the dirty clumps on his bayonet and turning them over like a farmer turns over dung. He knocked on the walls, looked into the broad maw of the fire place, groping over the clay bottom of the hut as if something was buried there.

The black beast had risen from his chopping block and trampled behind him at every step, head down and arms hanging. The woman called to him sharply like a bad dog, and it trotted obediently back to its corner.

Also in the dark chamber next door there was only junk and nothing edible stored. The fellow hissed again grimly at the door, and the woman shoved him back. He had the demeanor of a watchful mutt who won't tolerate strangers poking around in his home.

We had to realize that it was necessary to put up empty stomachs. A drink of water would have to do.

A wooden bucket stood next to the stove. We ladled from it into our drinking cups, saw all sorts of unspeakable things swimming in it, and swallowed with disgust. Finally the man drank. He had crept up behind us, lurking, as if he himself envied the murky slurry in the bucket. No sooner had the last one finished than he fell upon the water. We saw with horror that he got down on all fours and drank in the manner of an animal, putting his mouth into the vessel and sucking in the liquid with a rattle. The woman chased him away with a kick.

Simonides said that we had obviously come to a hot spot of Russian culture and, if he could have played God a little, he would wirelessly transfer the gentleman Pointares and the French Academy here so that they could see the Russian brother in all his glory.

"No," said Karl Sammt, "it is certainly bad with that man. He is an idiot. But idiots are not a Russian specialty. And the woman ... Just look at her, she is not bad looking. Imagine her without the rags ... a clean gown ... Well, am I right?"

He made big, rolling eyes at her, his entire experience as a waiter blossomed. He had told enough about his adventures in Poznan, Polish countesses appeared in it, one had shot at him with a revolver, a violin virtuoso had taken Veronal because of him - two tablets more and it would have been over - now he seemed to want to invite us to witness what a guy he was.

The woman noticed that we were talking about her, turned, wiggled her hips, and flashed her black eyes back at him.

"He's trying diplomacy," Luftschütz said.

Simonides sighed; we had no luck in diplomacy: and we really had to go to sleep hungry, too, despite his efforts.

The woman fetched two arms full of straw, threw them into the chamber, we covered them with our cloaks and lay down. I was too tired to think and too tired to sleep. I lay between waking thoughts and the fabric of dreams in the gray twilight of consciousness. Eckler groaned and rattled in his corner. The good fellow couldn't sleep, I could tell he was gasping for breath in agony, but he was far too good a comrade to wake the others. The blizzard drove around the house, seized it with rough paws, whistled cuttingly through invisible cracks. A sharp scraping sound mingled with its manifold howling. It took a considerable while before my nerves were sufficiently aroused to overcome the paralysis. After it had been dark in the next room for a long time, light now penetrated our chamber through the crack under the door.

The steady scraping sound came from our hosts' room. The door hung askew on the hinges, gaped finger-width by the lock. I saw our landlady kneeling on the floor, near the stove, busily rubbing. The brush scratched sharply and evenly. In the regular motion of the scrubbing, the plump body of the woman bumped back and forth, shoulders and buttocks full of luscious flesh. This nocturnal scrubbing, this fit of cleanliness in the midst

of a dirt-starved economy were incomprehensible to me and almost disturbing in their strangeness.

Eckler heard me groping and rustling in the straw.

He called to me softly, drawing me down to his mouth with a sweaty hand; we should not let him go to waste here, should not stay here, and should try again tomorrow to reach our troop. I promised, he seemed to become calmer and after a while to find sleep; the scouring had stopped, only the storm roared through the forest...

The morning brought a new attack of hunger on the obduracy of our hosts. When the woman again affirmed that there was nothing, nothing at all, and pointed to her stomach and belly with a pitiful face, saying that there was nothing in there, not for days, Luftschütz angrily held his fist in front of her face. She shouldn't want to make us believe such things, whether we could be so stupid as to believe such lies. You don't look like her, with such flab, after days of starvation.

Luftschütz flew aside in the middle of the roar; the idiot had risen up behind him and flung him away with a swipe of his paw. He looked terrible, his fused brows hanging bushily over smoldering eyes, his teeth bared behind the shaggy hangings of his beard.

The woman snarled, walked up to him, thrust her fist against his chest, he growled and squirmed in front of her, then gave in and retreated back into his corner.

Eckler sat at the table, his face gray with decay, his skin like limp linen, every breath a painful labor:

"For God's sake, friends, get away from here. It will be all right. I'll drag myself along. I'll give you no trouble."

If we did not want to use force against our stubborn hosts, in the manner of Soldateska in Simplizissimus, with a bit of bayonet tickling and sole-burning, we had to strive to get away as soon as possible. A tedious march on a hungry stomach was not a friendly prospect, but it would have to be dared, if only because of Eckler.

Karl Sammt initiated new negotiations. It was even more difficult than before. The woman did not understand his waiter's Polish; perhaps this language was completely foreign to her. So they fenced back and forth with gestures, and Karl Sammt became more and more annoyed.

During this windmill-like understanding, I remembered the night's scouring work. I looked at the area around the stove. There was a stone slab

embedded in the clay floor, through the middle of which a channel descended to a hole in the floor. So this was a kind of sink, and it was obvious from the slab that the woman's efforts had been directed at it.

"My God," said Karl Sammt, utterly exhausted, "how is this going to end? She claims that there is no way out of the forest, or that she doesn't know any - is that possible? That these people are sitting here in the middle of the forest and don't know how to get to their own people!"

Simonides thought that the woman must be interested in getting rid of us. So we could assume from the start that she would not refuse to give us information if she could.

“That was nonsense,” said Luftschütz,” they needed food and clothes. They were alive and not running around naked, so it could be assumed that they knew a way to get to people.”

He was in favor of staying there until hunger forced them to come out with their supplies or to show us the way.

"No, no, don't stay here," Eckler groaned.

“If we didn't have to take the sick person into consideration,” Simonides replied, “we could try again to find the way ourselves. But it would not do to trudge at random through the forest with Eckler.”

Half the day passed in discussions and new fruitless efforts to reach an understanding. The woman shrugged her shoulders and laughed in Karl Sammt's face. Eckler had lain down on the straw again; we heard his struggle for breath from the chamber.

About two o'clock the woman called a few words to the idiot. He immediately grew from his chopping block up to the smoky ceiling, grinned treacherously and then put on a hairy fur pelt that hung over the bed. Wordlessly he walked out of the hut, we saw him trudge through the driving snow toward the forest.

"Let's wait until it stops snowing," said Luftschütz.

He looked through the dim windows into the flurry of flakes. It's terrible, but I felt as if Luftschütz had actually said something completely different. And when I looked into the eyes of my comrades, I realized that they had understood it as well as I had. Let's wait ... Let's wait ... until this rattling in the chamber has stopped. Our healthy strength would then be put once again uninhibited to our rescue.

We waited.

Karl Sammt and the woman walked around each other and looked at

each other meaningfully. Her wild voluptuousness swayed seductively against him. Once more he used his best waiter charm and manners and it was as if his grey tattered shirt had grown tails.

Luftschütz made jokes again, but they sounded sharp and forced:

"Shut up," said Karl Sammt, "it's getting to all of us."

Simonides, who was an organist in Breslau, had painted a keyboard on the tabletop with charcoal and was playing a fugue by Bach. Spasmodically, his legs worked the invisible pedals under the table; to the fingerings on the painted manual he sang the notes in a confusion of voices.

Karl Sammt and the woman sat on the edge of the bed. He told stories from his life in German and Polish. He told stories about impostors, cardsharps, and the international adventures of being a waiter. She sat next to him, in her heavy, plump femininity, tolerating him becoming more familiar and putting his arm around her hips. Towards evening, she got up, put new logs in the stove, so that a fierce crackling started, and put pots on the fire, in which she boiled water.

She laughed at Karl Sammt, pointed to her mouth, and went “ hamm! hamm!”

Karl Sammt rejoiced: "There you go! Now there is food. You have to know how to tame them ... if you didn't have me, lazy gang, you could starve here."

He looked into all the pots, from which the broth-song of water was pouring, always had his hand tenderly on her shoulder or her ankles. Simonides wiped the organ keyboard from the tabletop, ran his blackened fingers against our faces, and then went out to clean himself in the snow.

A while later, night was already falling, the idiot came. Around his shoulders hung a bleeding animal, its fur stripped. Legs and head lurched forward, the man's fur, neck and hands were covered with blood, the strand of beard around his mouth was sticky with blood.

Simonides came behind him, with a shy look at the man and his prey. The idiot threw the animal on the clay ground and slurred some words. While the woman dragged the carcass to the stone slab and began to cut it up with a large knife, Simonides took me aside. He didn't know what to think, he had seen the man coming out of the forest when he had just rubbed his hands with snow outside. But not like us, upright, on two legs, but on all fours, just as he had fallen over the water bucket yesterday. I asked him not to tell our comrades about it, because he might well have

been mistaken in the twilight and the others might easily feel disgusted by his story. But now it was above all necessary to strengthen ourselves so that we could finally get out of this forest.

In the meantime the woman had cut up the animal on the stone slab; the blood ran off through the gutter. I thought the prey was a lamb, but Luftschütz, shaking his head, said it looked more like a large dog to him.

"Whether lamb or dog," I said, "there must be a village nearby where the fellow got it. We must not be choosy; we must fill our stomachs, so that we may come to strength. I don't see the purpose for which people are holding us back here. But this much is certain, that we must not stay here any longer.

A slurping and slurping came from the corner of the stove. There the idiot squatted by the water bucket and drank like a beast with a dripping snout until the woman drove him away.

When the meat was cooked and roasted, we carried the best piece of the roast to Eckler on his straw bed. It smelled tempting enough and we were proud to have conquered our greed and to have served our sick comrade first. But he reared up in disgust and horror, pushing the meat away from him and gasping that he didn't want a bite of that meat.

"Don't eat of it! Don't eat of it! Not a bite ... Comrades, don't eat it!"

Luftschütz grumbled something about stiff-neckedness and sickness stubbornness. We agreed with him, but Eckler threw himself around on his cot, didn't want to hear anything, closed his ears with his hands and stuck his head into the straw. This behavior of the otherwise so good-natured and yielding man did not remain without impression on us. We shied away from eating this meat, the reluctance of a man who, on the threshold of death, perhaps had a scent of things that remained hidden from us, drove us back as well.

Our hosts, after the woman had invited us to eat with a laugh in vain, set about roast and boiled meat alone. The woman cut the morsels with a knife, the man tore the pieces with his hands. and greedily stuffed his mouth full. We sat silently, gripped by horror, in the corners of the hut and watched this vile grub until almost everything was devoured.

That night our good comrade Eckler died.

I was the first to notice it. The sound of scratching and scraping at the stove woke me from sleep, and when I looked through the crack in the door, I saw the hag kneeling on the floor like yesterday, scrubbing the stone slab.

When I wanted to get to my place, I bumped into Eckler. It struck me only at that moment that he was not breathing. I touched him. He was cold. In the morning we buried him in front of the hut. We had to shovel away a meter of snow before we could go into the ground. We were so weak that it took us several hours to do this work; the tools fell out of our hands. The cold wind blew through our bodies into the finest divisions of the veins.

Simonides said a prayer and concluded it with the words, "God grant you eternal bliss and help us out of this forest. Amen."

The idiot and the woman stood under the door of the hut and watched us, without any trace of sympathy for this painful dying and being buried far from home. When we returned from the funeral to the hut, Luftschütz went to the stove, where in a corner there were the remains of yesterday's meal. We stood around him. Greed dripped from our eyes and mouths, cramped our fingers together. But we kept order, and even though each of us felt as if he had to take over the whole thing, we nevertheless agreed to the honest division that Luftschütz made in the manner of a butcher.

Simonides muttered, "Don't! Don't!" looked doubtfully at his piece, then he lost his strength, his murmur was lost in space.

Although each of us had only a few bites, we felt better after the meal, and even became merry. Simonides played on his invisible organ keyboard a kind of variation on the theme: "The Count of Luxembourg", Karl Sammt had eyes for the woman again.

It became brighter and brighter in the world and in the hut, suddenly Simonides' playing hands caught the sun gold that came in at the window. He paused in the “Count of Luxembourg”, looked out on the forest in black and white, lowered his brow thoughtfully:

"Now we must seek the way," he said.

It was decided that he and Lustschütz should march out to first thoroughly search one direction. Karl Sammt and I formed the relief group. We were always to return to the hut, which in this wilderness was to us what a ship is to polar explorers. In vain we tried once again to make clear to the two forest people what it was all about. The idiot growled hostilely at us, pulling his upper lip from his teeth like a biting dog. Finally he ran out and did not come back.

Luftschütz and Simonides went on their way. I took off my socks and began to plug the palm-sized holes in my heels. I soon got tired of the work. Although I told myself that it was necessary in order to pass the march well,

a heaviness pulled my hands from it. A dull indifference sank into me like ashes, a satisfaction with the existence of things. I was not at all embarrassed to think that we would have to spend a few more days in the hut, and the effort of a march through the snow-covered forest seemed disproportionately great in comparison with the attainable. Hindenburg could manage without us. The main thing now was to get a good bellyful. Sniffing I went looking around the hut to see if something was still hidden somewhere.

Karl Sammt and the woman had become quite affectionate, he squeezed her full arms, and she laughed softly chuckling. It was already dark when we heard the cry of "Hello!”

We opened the door of the hut; Luftschütz stomped in through the yellow-lit up strip of snow.

"Where is Simonides," he asked. Fear ran through his features when he heard that we knew nothing of Simonides.

They had advanced as far as the great oak with the chalice and cross, had separated there to each seek a different site, and were going to meet again by the tree. Simonides had failed to appear and Luftschütz, after waiting for some time, had retreated, assuming that his comrade might have taken a different route to the hut. Now we knew that our friend was outside in the winter forest in the grim cold, without food. We sat around silently and bitterly. Luftschütz finally said that there was nothing we could do, that we would have to wait for daylight to search. Hunger had grown again, burrowing with sharp claws into our guts. It was best to go to sleep to numb it.

In the middle of the night I heard the idiot stomping into the hut, his hideous laughter arousing my anger. The woman laughed gurgling, then came the sharp scrape of scrubbing. A low whimper startled me; I listened up, it came from within me, I pulled my coat over my head, sank into a desolate stupor.

In the morning meat steamed in the pots, on the grate splashed fat large pieces. The smell filled the whole room. We made over the meal, ate abundantly and with haste. The idiot squinted at us enviously with hands and mouth, growled grimly, and had to be beaten back by the female's gaze. He was reluctant to give up his new prey.

When we wanted to break away, Karl Sammt began to complain of nausea. No wonder, with this careless slurping into an empty, weakened

stomach. A residue of suspicion that Karl Sammt's indisposition was a pretext to stay behind with the woman vanished when I saw him doubled over, running in front of the hut and vomiting violently. He was better now, he said, but he felt too weak to walk in the forest.

We pushed through the sun's flickering and the snow's sparkling. Gold, blue and black were intermingled, the hard frozen crust sometimes broke under our feet, then we often sank up to the hips in the softer snow. The unspeakable beauty of loneliness shone through the forest, but it did not reach our hearts. There was a heavy wall of fearful foreboding.

From the chalice oak we followed the tracks of our comrade. At the tracks we saw his heavy but purposeful striding. He had kept his direction between the trunks. We walked in Simonide's footsteps for about two hours. Suddenly, Luftschütz pointed sideways into the suppressed bracken. A second track ran alongside. Four large paws, set side by side in a dog trot, always followed the footsteps of our comrade. We spoke nothing, but strove faster forward, fell into snow holes, tore ourselves loose again, stomped covered with sweat under hanging spruce branches. The hot breath of our steaming bodies hung as a cloud around us. A small hollow surrounded by bushes opened up to the two tracks. Luftschütz stumbled and fell forward into the snow. His kicking scooped out a rifle that had half sunk into the snow due to its heaviness. The winter blanket of the hollow was rumpled, torn down to the forest floor, tufts of moss and snow soaked with blood.

"Wolves!" said Luftschütz. He did not look at me.

A single track wriggled free from the hollow, paws now large and heavily weighed down in the snow; a furrow had been swiped alongside, a coral string of blood running along it. We followed the gruesome signs, hopelessly. They led through shrub and thorn, winding into young forest, chasing over cracked marsh ice, always. That patter of paws and the red-banded furrow beside. Doggedly and without question about the goal we followed it. May it lead us into the dense forest, from which there was no escape for us ... Hours became eternities. The area around us somehow carried familiarity. We had already seen this cut of the treetops, this line of the trees. They were already fixed in our memory with a quiet familiarity.

We broke out of the dense tangle of spruce trees into a clearing. Over there, in the already quietly blowing twilight, lay our cabin. The tracks ran along the edge of the clearing, trailing behind the cabin.

At that moment, a scream struck us. In the infinite loneliness of the

woods, where our sudden stop had thrown only the beating of our leaping hearts, came a cry of horror, torn loose from a man's breast. Then a rumbling, snarling and wrestling in the hut before us. We threw ourselves into the snow, wading with thrusting arms as through deep water, red mist before our eyes, hammer blows pounding in our brains.

Gurgling screams in front of us, then a loud swearing ... we had reached the threshold, grabbed the door, it thrashed roughly against my forehead from the inside. A pounding rolled into my head, a lump flew, a bristly, strapping monster, black and heavy, a tearing beast with dripping mouth ran between us ... and with a leap into the snow, ran on all fours howling into the forest...

Karl Sammt was lying on the clay floor of the hut with his throat torn. Blood was pouring out of his neck in gushes. Horror contorted his face; in his dying gaze was death and horror.

The woman, bent over him, her hair torn to shreds, screamed senselessly, beat her chest, and then leaped into the doorway, barking words of abuse and cursing into the forest and the twilight. Karl Sammt seemed to recognize us; he clasped his hand to his neck, rattled gurgled blood from the terrible wound. The hand closed into a fist, sank down, a trembling ran through his body - and then with a sudden jerk everything stood still. We lost no time, with one look we exchanged our wills, guns in fists we jumped out of the house. A high, cool, wine-colored sky still hung over the forest. Our holy rage did not ask about night and cold and the possibility of success. We wanted to take down the enemy...

In the distance a wolf howled.

Quickly gray crept into the wine color of the sky. For a while we could still see the outlines of the tracks in the snow. Then the darkness wiped them away under the forest trees. Our anger crushed; our souls unquenched. We walked in circles around the hut, peering out of the edge of the forest into the clearing. Once it was as if soft footsteps crept around us. We stood and sniffed the darkness. It was dull and inscrutable.

We had one night to ponder our revenge.

"Tomorrow!" said Luftschütz.

"Tomorrow!" I vowed.

We turned towards the hut, which was blinking in the distance with a pointed light. Suddenly a ball of darkness tore itself loose, dashed violently against Luftschütz, and threw him down. There was a rolling in the snow, a

snorting and snapping. A giant beast, a wolf, with glowing fangs had bitten into my comrade's leg.

"Help, help!" he gasped.

His strong fists had gripped the animal's neck, pushing back the shaggy head. I plucked the Mauser pistol from the belt pouch, seeking a safe shot in the melee. Two green lights glowed at me with flames of hatred. I held against my right eye and pulled the trigger. The shot rolled far through the forest. Howling, the wolf let go of the leg, tearing itself away from the clutches of the enemy. A futile snap at my hand, then darkness swallowed the fleeing beast. Gasping, Luftschütz rose, leaning heavily on my shoulder.

"Are you all right?" I asked. "The leg is torn, but my bones are harder than a wolf's teeth."

Groaning softly, Luftschütz limped toward the hut, the small patch of woods stretching into an agonizing ordeal for the wounded man. A wide band of blood was poured over the threshold. It stretched over the clay floor of the hut into the chamber.

Our dead comrade lay alone.

Next door in the chamber was a whimpering moan and a rustling in the straw. The tallow candle stood on the table with a long predatory wick and a flame flickering wildly in the breeze. I lifted it and stepped into the darkness with a ready pistol. The idiot crouched at an angle, flapped his hands, grabbed straw and pushed it away again. The woman squatted at his head; the hanging strands of hair covered her face.

I approached the man. The straw was soaked with blood. Light fell on his face. He raised his head, his teeth bared at me, he growled, his left eye sparkled green with animal hatred. The right eye, however, was destroyed, blood and mucus stood in the cavity, and unceasingly thick red juice oozed over the right half of the face and into the straw.

The woman had risen and was leaning against the wall. Between her hanging hair, her eyes were blazing fire. The tallow light trembled in my outstretched hand. Suddenly she pushed herself off the wall and lunged at me, silently and with a tremendous force. The light fell away from me, straw flared up, I had to fight back against a force almost superior to mine. She bit at my neck, at my hands, tore furiously at my skin with curved nails.

Luftschütz came to my rescue. In the smoke of the burning straw we wrestled, and rolled on the floor.

When we had finally, almost suffocated, subdued and bound them, we

extinguished the fire. The tallow light struggled in the smoke with a small flame.

I approached the wounded man.

He had died during our wrestling. The lips were drawn back from his teeth. The strong teeth were shining. His big black hairy hands lay buried in the straw like the paws of a wolf.

The Triumph of the Machine

The city's toy industry had boomed in recent years.

All the cultured states demanded the mechanical toys, so colorful and so precise, the drum-beating clowns, the indefatigable fencers, the rushing automobiles, and the defiant battleships equipped with real steam engines. And even the unsophisticated states, whose needs were less urgent, were vigorously supplied with copies of these toys. In the backwoods of the colonies and in the deserts of Africa, Negro boys were often found with the ruins of one of these excellent items. A well-known explorer even claimed to have been deceived in the wilderness of the Malagarasi by a quite outlandish monkey, which, sitting in the branches of a Borassus palm tree, appeared to be the appearance of a completely new species until the discovery of a Trademark and serial number (D.R.P.No. 105 307) thwarted all hopes. But the independent press soon enough relegated this story to the category of fantastic digressions, indispensable among African researchers, and condemned it as a new move of the detestable colonial policy.

But the most sought-after were the mechanical rabbits made by Stricker & Vorderteil. These little animals, which were in no way inferior to their natural counterparts, could hop like their living models and, when the spring was tightened, ran in circles five or six times. A mechanical universal genius, an American, of course, whose abilities seemed to have fallen from heaven, had improved the pathetic, lifeless animals that were currently being produced by the factory. But just when the company seemed to be at the height of its achievements and glory, the fall followed. With the insolence of someone believing themselves to be indispensible, Mr. Hopkins one day demanded that his previous salary be doubled, that his working hours be cut in half, that he set up his own experimental workshop, and that a villa be built for him outside the city as his summer residence. Mr. Stricker showed himself inclined to give in. But Mr. Vorderteil objected most vehemently:

"One must not do this on principle alone. In half a year Hopkins would have new demands."

Mr. Stricker could see that, too.

The American accepted the boss's decision with a smile and replied to it by resigning. A little consternation and chagrin was soon overcome by the

consideration that after all the most important factory secrets were already known to them, and that therefore there was no fear of any disruption of the business.

"But what," said the timid Mr. Stricker, "if Hopkins himself now opens a rival factory?"

"Let me see to it," Mr. Vorderteil reassured him. Mr. Vorderteil, who was connected by some underground way with the mayor of the town, said: “I will make sure that he does not get the permits for such a thing."

In the meantime, Mr. Hopkins performed his duties as before, refining the products of the factory with some small improvements, as if he intended to remain forever in the service of Stricker & Vorderteil, and as if he had only to shake his inventions out of his sleeve. Just in these last weeks, tremendous orders of rabbits were received, and the factory felt compelled to expand its operation to produce all these legions of little animals. Smiling as always, Hopkins took his leave at the end of his contractual notice period, pulled his impeccable top hat low before the previous bosses, and walked away, remaining silent about his further intentions in an almost disturbing manner. What Mr. Stricker had fearfully suspected; was soon to prove correct. Through his underground contacts, Mr. Vorderteil received word from the mayor's office that Mister Hopkins had purchased a building lot and had registered for permission to build a factory.

"Think," he shouted at his companion, "Think what he wants to do."

"I don't know," Mr. Stricker said, and he really didn't have a clue this time. "He wants to make Toys made of colored Air Glass. Colored Air Glass, have you ever heard of such a thing?”

Mr. Stricker had not heard of such a thing, but he trusted Hopkins capable of anything, including Colored Air Glass, and that's why he paled, shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, and grew three inches shorter.

"Colored Air Glass... Such nonsense."

"Calm down. Maybe it's a printing error, and Hopkins means air gas. I've heard of that."

But Mr. Vorderteil banged on the table so that the big Shannon registrator above his head began to sway, and shouted, "We need all our level-headedness, don't make jokes on the edge of the abyss. When Hopkins says Air Glass, he means Air Glass, and I understand he has also given a brief outline of his plan of operation, from which so much is to be understood that he has invented a method of fixing the air so that it will

withstand higher temperatures and exhibit all the properties of glass without being fragile."

"After all, that would be a revolution of the whole industry, and it is amiable enough that for the present he confines himself to toys."

"Very amiable, to be sure. But just think if children now made dice, balls, jumping jacks and locomotives out of Colored Air Gas, which is unbreakable and therefore not dangerous. Maybe it will also make mechanical rabbits. 0h!"

And Mr. Vorderteil leaned back so violently that the Shannon registrator finally fell on his head after all.

While the papers were still fluttering about him, he sprang to his feet, "But it must not be permitted, and if you, Mr. Stricker, persist in your incomprehensible indolence, I thank God that I have connections with whose help I can frustrate his plan."

There was much communication through the underground channel between the mayor and Mr. Vorderteil during the next few weeks, and the "relations" proved themselves in a persistent deflection of all the petitions, appeals, and complaints of Mr. Hopkins, so that Mr. Stricker was compelled to grow smaller every day by about two inches under the steady triumphs of his partner.

When the seventeenth petition of Mr. Hopkins had been dismissed, the following occurred. One day there was a strange noise at the door of the mayor's office, and the American, followed by two monstrous mastiffs, entered the anteroom, which was cramped with filing cabinets, all kinds of reverently preserved junk, and rolls of blueprints. The chancellors and clerks immediately jumped into adjoining rooms, whose doors began to groan under the pressure of the bodies pressed against them. Hopkins was able to enter the mayor's room unimpeded with his two monsters, their heads reaching almost to his shoulders. While he stood before the mayor with his top hat off the Great Danes began sniffing the cabinets in unadulterated dog fashion, knocking over the wash pitcher and mindlessly placing the prints of their paws in the pattern of the carpet, the mayor struggled for words.

"Don't you know," he shouted at last, "that dogs are to be kept outside?"

"0h, yes," Hopkins said, smiling, "dogs are to be kept outside."

"So how can you presume to bring your mutts in here?”

"That is because; they're not dogs at all."

"Really, what are they then?"

"Machines, Mr. Mayor," and Hopkins called one of the dogs to him, unscrewed its head so that the gears inside could be seen, and then explained the mechanism of the running, the snuffling, and the particularly sensible apparatus of the tail-wagging.

"What are you showing me this for?" cried the mayor, almost pleadingly, as there was no end to the wheels, pendulum springs, and electric batteries.

Mister Hopkins put his dogs out of action and answered with a question, "Why won't you allow me to build my factory?"

"You'll have to ask the city building department what building codes are against it."

"I've already been to the city building department. There they sent me to the police department."

"Well, and?"

"There they sent me to the city physicist."

"So what?"

"There they wanted to send me to the building office again. But I preferred to go straight to you myself."

The mayor, seeing himself abandoned by his auxiliary troops, yielded to answering for himself:

"Very well," he said, "you were turned away because the legal conditions have not been met."

"They have been, and if you do not want to believe me, I know how to force you to acknowledge them."

Under the lifeless, unmoving eyes of the two mastiffs, which seemed to be as menacingly dangerous as those of their master, the Mayor dared neither to roar without giving reasons, nor to contradict with reasons. (These three bodies, which enclosed him in a magical triangle, were like the containers of stored up forces, which were only waiting for the release of the mechanism).

Rather meekly he put his question: "Well ... and... what are you going to do?"

"Oh, I have the choice among some hundred means. Let's say, for example ... the

Rabbits."

"Ra- ... Rabbits?"

"Yes.... I'm letting a billion mechanical rabbits out over the city."

Now the mayor could relax with a hearty laugh: "One billion mechanical....ha... ha."

"You obviously have no concept of a billion and even less of mechanics and of the effect of inanimate objects to which motion is given."

But the mayor could not contain his laughter and kept repeating:

"Mec - mechanical rabbits."

"You will take that risk then?"

"Yes sir, yes sir ...!"

"All right," said Mr. Hopkins, waving his impeccable top hat goodbye, he pressed on the release lever of the motion mechanism of his dogs and strode out the door with a friendly smile, followed by them.

The mayor could not recover for another two hours, and it was not until all of the departments in his office had dutifully survived their fit of laughter, that he set off. Exhausted by his unaccustomed activity, he went home smiling to tell his wife about this delicious joke. In front of his house he saw in the corner next to the door, shyly pressed against the wall, miserable and with rough fur a lovely white rabbit of the kind that was the well known product of the company Stricker & Vorderteil. He reached out his hand for the small animal, amused by the thought that Hopkins had now put a rabbit, in front of his door, but the rabbit began to jump and hop and eluded him with a rather quick escape. With satisfaction he saw, while he was still contemplating the idea of chasing after it, that it was caught further down the street by some of the Alley boys."

The mayor's wife took immense pleasure from her husband's report and immediately saw in the threat a welcome supply of cheap children's toys. When little Hedwig came in with a white rabbit that she had found outside on the ground floor, she laughed heartily and never stopped laughing when Richard also brought in a rabbit that had been sitting under the kitchen table, and when Fritz and Anna each brought a rabbit from out of the darkness of the cellar.

The senselessly jumping animals with the stamped glass eyes were put into a corner, from which, however, they broke out again and again under the shouts of the children.

But when the cook reported with pale face, that a rabbit had blindly jumped into a large pot of jam, the housewife's excitement won out over the

mother's laughter. In the course of the afternoon the rabbits multiplied in an embarrassing way. They seemed to lurk in all corners, growing out of the cracks in the floor, sitting on all the cornices and borders, hopping blindly everywhere until the laughter stopped and a somewhat annoying humming took its place.

The mayor escaped from his plague and walked through a twilight speckled with bouncing white spots to his reading club. But his fellow club members were just as perplexed as he was and sat in the sanctum of the Silence where they gathered for a palaver, while an ever-growing number of rabbits, who had invaded the club in some mysterious way, disturbed their thinking functions. Joseph, the club servant, swept the animals out of the room from time to time with a broom, but a moment later they seemed to spring up again from all the corners and blindly and haphazardly wandered bouncing through the rooms with their gawking red glass eyes.

Suddenly some were on the reading table and broke up the sacred order of the newspapers. The gentlemen looked at each other with angry glances, beside themselves with nervousness about these disturbances, and finally left when they were convinced that Joseph was powerless with the broom, and that their palaver would not succeed.

In the evening the mayor felt a hard object under the sheet of his bed and when he searched forebodingly, he pulled out a rabbit gazing stupidly out of glass eyes. With a curse he threw it to the floor, but the animal only made a squeaking sound like a hard knocked instrument and hopped on. This proof of solidity infuriated the mayor out of his mind and reached with its effects even into his dreams teeming with rabbits. They jumped around a word written in giant letters in the sky, the dreadful word "unbreakable". Incalculable flocks of rabbits climbed like fairy-tale-cats up and down the letters and stared with lifeless red glass eyes at the spot on which the mayor felt himself lying in bed and held by a heavy dream.

As he was about to wash off the sweat of that evil night he saw the marble top of his washstand covered with white rabbits, and one of the animals lay gloomy with matted fur at the bottom of the wash water. With a delightful gloating, he hurled the animal to the floor and was just about to joyfully exalt in its destruction, when it slowly aligned itself and began to hop with undiminished liveliness.

In the street, each step tripped over one of the small monsters, which endured all the cruel tortures of the street boys, all the kicks, even the

crushing by the heaviest trucks with incomprehensible tenacity. Rabbits sat on the stairs of the city hall, rabbits met him in the corridors, and rabbits looked down dully from the highest filing cabinets. The Mayor strode through his distraught, rabbit-ridden chancery staff and with all the effort of heroism entered his bureau. On the large desk sat thirteen rabbits and they hopped in all directions so that the papers, spread out in ingenious confusion rustled under their restless hind legs.

The mayor sank down on his comfortable chair before this spectacle and wished for all the delights of annihilation. He awoke from his stupor with a cry, as his tired hands slid down onto his lap and touched the soft fur of a rabbit. Now it seemed to him that the animals had something around their small; lively mouths that could almost have been called a smile. It was the rigid smile of lifeless things, but in this terrible multiplication it seemed to increase and gain importance, and at last he believed it was the smile of Mister Hopkins repeated a hundred thousand times by the dreadful little beasts.

With a tremendous muster of his strength he called Mr. Vorderteil to him. The two sat across from each other distraught for a while, until the mayor remembered his dignity.

"This Mister Hopkins ..." he said.

"Yes, that Mister Hopkins ..." said Mr. Vorderteil

"A billion mechanical rabbits…”

"Unbreakable ... Unbreakable ...” affirmed Mr. Vorderteil.

"Terrible ... a billion mech ..." The Mayor had to fend off a rabbit that suddenly sat on his shoulder and wanted to climb onto his head. "Your cursed ..." he shouted angrily and wanted to start crying with rage.

"Yes sir ... Yes sir ... But I don't understand…”

"What don't you understand?"

"The factory has never produced so many rabbits during its entire existence."

"Then where do the animals come from?"

Mr. Vorderteil could not answer, because he was flooded with a stream of red ink... from an inkpot that had just been knocked over by a rabbit. His beautiful new black trousers were irretrievably ruined. And the Mayor laughed about it, convulsively, almost howling, until Mr. Vorderteil had recovered enough so that he could reply,

"I believe that this Hopkins himself has bought up all the last big

orders. This person is a devil...

And now he is letting it all go against us. But ..." and he leaned towards the mayor despite the red stream still trickling between them. "I believe something else ... More horrible."

"What?" said the head of the city, as he felt the narrow fringe of hair on the back of his neck rise.

"Haven't you noticed, Mr. Mayor? That two species, certainly two generations of rabbits are in

activity?"

Truly! Truly! Among the three and twenty rabbits that swarmed on the desk of the mayor, there were some that seemed to be smaller, more delicate and younger than the others, whose fur looked softer and more supple, and still moved with a certain youthful awkwardness. Otherwise they bore all the characteristics that united this army of small monsters. The red, gawking glass eyes, which were lifeless in the head and the small, painted snouts with the traces of a ghastly smile.

"You see, and that's just the very most horrible thing. For I must tell you that Mr. Hopkins, when he was still with us, spoke of a revolutionary discovery, of a multiplication of mechanical rabbits by an asexual means. We laughed at him at that time. But now he has made his discovery and used it for this purpose ... obviously, quite obviously ... to terrorize us. His rabbits are wonderful images of life, they give birth, and tonight we will have the third generation, tomorrow morning the fifth generation, and the day after tomorrow we're heading into the second billion."

This conversation came to a surprising and very rapid conclusion, caused by the severance of the underground communication system between the mayor and Mr. Vorderteil. From a natural desire to preserve his sanity, and perhaps also in momentary confusion, a fever of hatred and despair filled the mayor and he caught the instigator of the plague, spun it around his head a few times and finally threw it out the door.

But this act of violence was no help against the rabbits. The city had smiled at the appearance of the rabbits, then a murmur of anger went through it, the anger was followed by dismay, the dismay by consternation, and despair. And now horror and disgust had settled in. One could not sit down at the table without these white beasts jumping blindly between the bowls. And if someone threw the animals to the floor in an outburst of frenzy, he had only to be convinced of their unbreakability. They only gave

way to the wood chopper or the fire and with the permission of the magistrate chopping blocks were erected in all the alleys and squares and ignited into a blaze, to which rabbits were added in buckets, aprons and barrels. But despite these measures, the number of rabbits increased hourly, and at last, overcome with disgust, they, gave up the fight. The fires burned down and polluted the air with the stench of singed hair. The rabbits destroyed business life, traffic, and swarmed through all the functions of public life, and even intruded into the secret pleasures of love.

However, when a dead child was born on New Street, who, as a result of the horror was born before its time, and bore a red birthmark in the shape of a rabbit all over its face, indignation arose, and little was missing to create a general uprising. They would have marched with all the attributes of the revolution straight to the town hall. In this decisive and dangerous moment, the mayor remembered Napoleon the Third, who had understood how to make his people, who grumbled about their domestic miseries, forget about them through the splendor of festivals. An external action against the action to counterbalance the inner disquiet seemed all the more necessary to him because he had already with horror seen five successive generations of rabbits. He therefore ordered that the Schiller celebration scheduled for tomorrow had to take place.

Like a captain from the mast of his sinking ship before he is swallowed up by the sea, the mayor looked out from the tower of the town hall the following day. Although it was only September the streets, the roofs and the public buildings seemed to have disappeared under a blanket of snow. But the blanket teemed, moved, cracked, and closed again; it was nothing other than the promised billion mechanical rabbits. The mayor rose from the tower an old man, glided down over the soft backs of a few thousand rabbits and took down the report of the police officers about the arrest warrant for Hopkins that had been sent out by the police. They had been unable to find him anywhere, and the mayor was almost glad of it, because he had foreseen it so exactly, so exactly…

The citizens gathered in the evening for the Schiller celebration, after a hard battle with the rabbits that filled the streets and moved in closed swarms. At the crossroads it was especially difficult to get through, because here the crowds that met each other were double and triple on top of each other and piled up several layers of jumping, hopping, crawling rabbits. In the hall, too, it became difficult to stand one's ground. One had to put up

with rabbits jumping between the feet of the guests; they occupied space on the chairs and on the parapet of the galleries, one after the other as if on the relief of a sculptor gone mad.

A professor of great merit for the intellectual life of the city gave the keynote address, and when he was in the midst of the most splendid advertisement for the ideal good of the nation, he pulled a rabbit out of his tailcoat pocket and with a gesture of disgust hurled it at the others. It was taken almost as a matter of course. Even more unpleasant it seemed, was when during the following overture, the wind instruments made a strange squeaking sound at every moment, after rabbits had crawled into their tubes.

Now, however, Miss Beate Vogl, the youthful dramatic singer of the municipal theater, advanced to the podium to perform some compositions to Schiller's songs. Her bosom and her beautiful neck rose from a very low cut and wonderfully rich dress, and the delicacy of her skin successfully competed with the delicacy of her performance. Everyone seemed attentive and focused. The audience's attention was directed toward the podium, so that even the bustle of rabbits was less noticeable. But suddenly a silver ladder of notes broke in two in the middle of a song, and a scream, a ghastly scream tore apart the attention of the audience. With eyes bulging out in horror, Miss Beate Vogl seemed to be frozen, then her eyes lowered into the neckline of her dress, the sheet of music fluttered out of her hands, and then she pulled a rabbit out of her bosom with a pitiful howl, to which nine other, very small rabbits were hanging, as if they had just come into the world.


Foschner
1917

The excitement and disgust of the audience erupted into a roar in which chairs were thrown over, gowns kicked off, and a panic-like flight for the exit doors ensued until a clear and energetic voice from the podium called a halt. Mr. Hopkins stood up there beside the swooning Singer, waved his impeccable top hat and bowed to the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "please listen to me for a few words. You would all have been spared the embarrassing excitement of the last few days if you had been more familiar with the concept of a billion and had more respect for the achievements of modern technology. But I do not want to reproach you in any way and I wish nothing more than to put an end to this state of affairs, which is so unfortunate for our city. The rabbits will disappear as soon as I have the approval of my building permit application in my hand. If, however, contrary to expectation, you do not take my wishes into consideration, I must - much as I am sorry - increase your discomfort by a few degrees."

Laughing, Mr. Hopkins pulled a wriggling rabbit by the ears out of his pocket, sat it on his arm, and continued, stroking the animal gently:

"So far, you've only met the harmless kind of my rabbits. You were only threatened in your habits, in your comfort, but now even your property is threatened. From tomorrow noon, ladies and gentlemen, some rabbits will appear which can also eat."

With that, he held out clover to the animal on his arm, and an entire, silent hall filled with people watched in horror as the mouse-like mouth of the animal shifted and pulled in the clover leaves with blunt fury.

They saw it, and those who did not see it believed their neighbors to have seen it, until at last they were convinced that they had seen it themselves. A billion unbreakable, mechanical, devouring rabbits! The horror was so heavy on the people that they could not scream, nor dare to shout, and they ran away from the hall as if a prophet of Pentecost Day had spoken to them there.

That very night an emergency meeting of the town council was called, and the very next morning a town servant sought out the American to bring him to the mayor. This time Mr. Hopkins was found. When he stood before the mayor and received the permit allowing him to build his factory, he knew he would have to answer a question. He waited for it. The mayor sat tired and thoughtful in his chair, his veiled eyes abiding in a land of

incomprehension.

“Tell me,” he began at last, stroking his head as if to relieve an agonizing pressure, "Tell me, I understand all of your skills to some extent, and I am not as ready as others in believing the impossible. But this one thing will always remain incomprehensible to me, that you could conquer the principle of life by mechanical means so far, as to have the ability to teach mechanical rabbits to eat as well; the rabbit you showed us…”

Then Mr. Hopkins laughed even harder than usual and waved his impeccable top hat... “It all comes down to the introduction,” he said, "This rabbit, Mr. Mayor, this rabbit was an exceptionally alive one.”

The Savior From The Gallows

A SPANISH HISTORY BY KARL HANS STROBL

It was completely dark, so dark, that the world was like a large black hole, like an enormous sack of black cloth.

That was because it was the middle of the night. It was night, not just in Spain, but elsewhere as well, over half the earth. If seen from above the ball of the earth would look like a black and yellow apple.

But in Spain, where the darkness was the thickest, in the Sierra Nevada, in the middle of the pitch-black darkness was the castle of Don Jose Inaquez. The castle was exceptionally secure. It hung like a swallow's nest above a steep cliff. Its bay windows and turrets rose from out of the abyss. Down below the river roared. On the other side against the back of the mountain was a deep moat and a triple wall with towers and machicolations and everything else that goes along with it.

But of course, you couldn't see any of that. It was pitch black.

It was an exceptionally secure castle. Don Jose had always, until now, depended on it. But since recent times…

The noble Don Alonso de Vargas lived nearby in another mountain nest. Within the Castilian knighthood Jose Inaquez was like a lion among the lambs. But Alonso de Vargas— he was something else. They said chilling things about him. When all his drinking buddies were passed out under the table, Alonso de Vargas was still sober, holding his tankard to his chest like a nurse holding a child when all the others are drowsy after staying awake for three days. When the others were stumbling into corners, he laughed and rode into the morning mist as if he had just woken up. They said that he didn't need any sleep when he was drinking. And Alonso de Vargas could drink— like ten knights together. When he took the mandolin into his hands you could be sure that you would not hear a gentle song about some beloved and her dark eyes, but instead mighty stanzas about other beauties; that is if he wasn't singing about blood and murder. Well— and also… the gambling devil was in the knight Alonso. He had lost his castle and everything in it, from the castle woman to the chained dog, three times already and won them back again.

But— when the wild week was over, the knight Alonso was a different

person. From midnight on Saturday to Sunday there was no more drinking and fornication. When the guards outside sounded twelve O'clock, Don Alonso put down the pitcher, put the mandolin into the corner and put the dice away. Then he became very serious and terribly decent until early morning Mass. When morning dawned, he went to the castle chapel, or to the dignified Dominican brothers when he was in town. He confessed his sins with tears in his eyes and with a trembling voice: drunkenness, fornication and gambling and…it was always the same. The spindly castle chaplain Aloisius and the fat Dominican Father Antonius could see the confessor's deep repentance and said:

"absolvo te".

Then Don Alonso listened to the Mass and received the Lord's body.

After he rose from the altar bench and walked with clanking spurs through the church, his eyes glowed like coals beneath the bushy eyebrows and he felt the power inside him to go forward, pure, unsullied and without sin. And so, it went until the next Saturday at midnight.

That was the usual course of events in the life of the knight. The people also spoke of some other things that went beyond that. There was the case of a Jew in which the knight was certainly guilty. One day the Jew disappeared. His corpse was pulled from the watery grave of Vargas' castle moat a fortnight later. Then there were some young people found dead in the streets or in the forest. It was worth noting that these young people had stood in the way of the knight's love trafficking. The same thing had happened to some of the upset fathers. Then the skinny Aloisius or the fat Antonius- whomever' s turn it was- shook their heads at Sunday morning confession, but in the end always spoke their: "absolvo te".

Then Don Jose Inaquez arrived in the company of the noble Don Vargas.

First, I need to say a little about how it all came about. You just don't know any more, what a man of high spirits will do. Don Jose was often away from his home for three weeks at a time. Donna Mercedes secretly wept at home, and her tears flowed like the mountain streams.

She soon discovered, in which clean company her husband could be found. Oh yes! So, he hadn't been saved yet. In the first months of her young marriage, she thought that Don Jose had become a different person; he was so interested in her. She had been quite proud of herself.

Well, there you had it. Now it was the same old tune again. Stay away

for three weeks! Then come back home, bloody, tattered, filthy, without any money… it was a shame. Then he would fall into bed and sleep for three days.

Donna Mercedes became terribly angry at her husband's friends.

They were the ones who debauched him. Naturally! He was so good and solid otherwise. Who was in this hellish company? She made inquiries.

It was de Vargas! Yes, really, de Vargas, that hellion. That rogue, that bad guy, that scoundrel- but the Blessed Virgin would punish him. She was so certain of it that Donna Mercedes donated two thick candles to the altar of Our Lady in the Dominican church in the city.

She hated Don Alonso with all the passion of her heart. If she could only get to him just one time! She would show him! She wanted to scratch out his eyes…

One night there was a loud crash on the stairs. Donna Mercedes already knew what it was. It was her husband. Today was the twenty-fourth day. But today it was especially annoying.

She opened the door and lit the oil lamp. They were bringing him up the stairs. The downstairs doorman and a stranger were dragging him by the arms and the stable boy was helping with the legs. Beneath the doorway the sassy rabble, the stable boy from the courtyard, grinned.

The fat doorman sweated and groaned. Then they brought the knight in and laid him on the Moorish divan in the corner. Her husband looked especially good today. He was full of filth from top to bottom. His hair was stuck together in matted spikes.

The doorman and the stable boy disappeared. The strange man stayed and kissed the hand of Donna Mercedes.

"Noble Donna, I am the knight Alonso de Vargas!"

Donna Mercedes was petrified.

"Please forgive him, noble Donna, the knight was with us. It was such a fun company. He drank too much to your good health. Forgive him!"

Donna Mercedes began to tremble. She didn't know whether it was from anger or from fear of those burning eyes. She wanted to say something, but she couldn't get anything out, because the knight could see right into her core with those eyes. She felt his gaze like a burning in her stomach.

De Vargas looked at her intently and once more took her hand:

"I don't want to disturb you any longer, Donna. Allow me to come

back and inquire about your condition." He kissed her hand and left.

Donna Mercedes stood right there and stared at the door. The steel bands glittered with the faint reflections from the light of the oil lamp which she had placed on the floor in front of the divan.

That is how Donna Mercedes made the acquaintance of the knight de Vargas.

The knight came often after that, as often as the absence of Don Jose Inaquez would allow. And Don Jose never put any obstacles in his path. He just sat and drank rock-solid.

But it finally became apparent that de Vargas was now never to be seen where Inaquez was sitting and drinking. And he always showed up once the other had been taken home. If Inaquez appeared on the scene again, de Vargas would disappear.

Naturally, the old women in the city were the first to shake their heads over it. Then it was their friends, and of course they all made jokes about it. Not exactly refined ones either.

Don Inaquez was a bit dull and didn't catch on right away. But after hearing the same thing for three weeks without asking about it, he finally asked. His friends laughed and toasted each other.

What was so funny?

Well, well, he already knew!

Not a thing, he didn't know anything.

But—

No, really, he didn't!

Well, his wife and Don Alonso de Vargas…

Good God! That made the knight go wild. He threw his mug at the speaker's head. But the other ducked and avoided it. The knight's aim was not very good, and the mug flew into the corner and shattered. A red stream of wine flowed under the table of the boozers.

But now Don Jose Inaquez was on his guard. Not because he loved his wife so much, that he would not share her with anyone; but he didn't want to be laughed at any longer. It was all so stupid! That de Vargas. He had believed the man had become virtuous. Now he knew why the scoundrel was never to be seen.

And while Don Inaquez was paying closer attention, so was de Vargas. Every Sunday morning, he cleansed himself of all his sins. Aloisius and Antonius, whose ever turn it was, shook their heads doubtfully, but in the

end, they always said; “absolvo te”.

So, luck was with him as well. — —

And so: it was dark, very dark, so dark that the entire world was like a big black hole, like a huge sack of black cloth. In the middle of the pitch-black of midnight rose the castle of Don Jose Inaquez.

Naturally you couldn’t see anything of the castle. But that was not necessary because castles want to sleep just like people do. And yet, the castle wasn’t completely asleep. There was one place inside where it was awake. Donna Mercedes’s rooms were lit. You couldn’t see them from the outside, because Donna had closed the iron shutters over the windows. The cracks were covered with cloth.

A hanging lamp with red glass hung down from the ceiling on three red cords. There were fragrant candles everywhere on the table and in the wall niches.

The lamp swung heavily back and forth and cast soft, flickering reflections. The knight de Vargas had just poked his head into the room.

Now he stood upright in the middle of the room and rubbed his aching head.

“Thunderation!”

Donna Mercedes stood in front of him. She shrank back:

“Alonso, don’t swear!”

De Vargas turned around. A crucifix hung on the wall. Beneath it was a basin of Holy Water made of beaten copper. De Vargas quickly dipped his fingers in the water and crossed himself.

“Forgive your servant, Oh Lord!”

Donna Mercedes was thoughtfully rubbing her nose.

“Do you really have to go?”

“Let me, dearest. I don’t know… I’m not quite well.”

“Then stay here, stay…” and Donna hung on his neck like a necklace.

“But… you know… I have a premonition.”

“Oh, that!” Donna Mercedes was very much in love.

De Vargas was not averse to staying. He was weakening. But today it felt too strange. He knew that Don Jose was up to something. And this woman here on his neck…

He really wanted to sink softly and willingly into her embrace. Then Donna Mercedes screamed.

De Vargas looked around. The woman was very pale and pointing at

the crucifix:

“There… look… the eternal light has gone out… by itself.”

The knight was not superstitious, but there are some things you need to take seriously. Where his understanding ended, there began the realm of the uncanny. And the realm of the uncanny was great.

The knight had also gone completely pale:

“Well, you see… I feel it… something is not right today. It is an omen.”

“Are you afraid of my husband?”

“Bah, he is sitting down below close by his mug today. His friends will soon bring him back. But something is… Blessed Virgin, tonight is a bad night.”

But it was also very peculiar. There was not a breath of air in the hazy room. The hanging light had calmed down and was no longer flickering. The fragrant candles burned as if beneath glass covers. Not a single flame flickered. And the eternal light had gone out— all by itself.

The knight took his rosary from out of his right trouser pocket. He always carried a rosary with him. A rosary was good for a lot of things. A man never knew.

The knight wrapped the rosary around his right wrist. Then he stuck his hand in the Holy Water and crossed himself again three times. The water ran over his hand, up his sleeve and it felt as if something cold was attacking him so that him arm was frozen to the elbow.

“Live well!”

“So, when are you coming back?”

“Tomorrow!”

“God be with you…Blessed Virgin!” —

Donna Mercedes screamed out loud, because there was a terrible noise at the door. The wood cracked and splintered. Someone outside the door was beating it down with an axe so that the chips were flying. De Vargas and Mercedes looked at each other. Both were as white as the wall. Mercedes started moving and ran to the bed. She jumped in and pulled the covers over her head, so that you couldn’t see anything of her except a lump under the rumpled bedding.

The door caved in, splintered and sagged on its hinges. De Vargas drew his sword and stood in the middle of the room. He murmured one prayer after another and called on all the saints.

Suddenly there was a mighty crash and the door fell into the room. Don Jose stood in the doorway. He was totally sober with a face contorted by rage.

At first, he couldn't see anything— because of his rage and because he had just came in from the darkness. But then he saw Alonso in the middle of the room.

Don Jose bellowed like a bull— short and deep. He raised his axe and charged forward. But the Blessed Virgin held her veil over Don Alonso; because he wore the rosary around his wrist.

Don Jose stumbled over the rubble of the door and fell into the room. And since Don Alonso was holding his sword out in front of him, Don Jose fell down on top of it. A stream of blood shot out. The tip pierced his lung. He rolled from side to side striking out at everything around him. In his struggle he grabbed on to the silk tapestries on the wall. The wonderful embroidery wrapped around the fist of the dying man.

The entire floor was full of blood.

Donna Mercedes was half dead. But still she was puzzled why she didn't hear the sound of weapons. There was only a muffled thrashing about, that from under her covers sounded like a wonderful giant seashell. She cautiously stuck her head out from under the covers.

And there she saw her husband on the ground, twitching convulsively and thrashing about. And everything was covered in blood.

The woman carefully stood up and on the tips of her toes crept up closer to the body. With curiosity and a pleasant horror, she watched this last battle. Then her husband threw himself on his side and saw her standing next to him.

His eyes glowed once more. He clenched his fists; foam came out of his mouth— then he stretched out and was dead.

The knight and woman looked at each other again. De Vargas pushed open the window and looked out. It was still terribly dark. But there was a soft glow over the world, as if the moon were battling with the clouds somewhere. You still couldn't see anything, but you sensed that soon you would be able to.

"Now what?" — Vargas finally asked with a wave of his hand.

Mercedes shrugged her shoulders. "No one can know, otherwise the entire household will rise up against us."

"So, what do we do?"

“Make it seem like he just fell in the large ravine by the narrow footbridge on the path to the city… It’s a miracle that it hasn’t happened long ago.”

That would work, and Mercedes was herself once more. She kissed her Alonso and made him promise to come back:

“The Blessed Virgin be with you!”

It was still very dark. But somewhere the moon was breaking through the clouds.

But the path was full of stones. Branches lay underfoot that the last storm broken off the trees. De Vargas stumbled without stopping. Plus, there was the heavy load on his back. Don Jose was certainly heavy — strangely so! De Vargas was no weakling, but it was tough going. Good thing it was downhill.

The knight would have liked to swear. But it was too dark and gruesome for that. Instead he called on the Virgin, his patron and all the other Saints. But it was no use, it remained just as dark as before. And the knight’s knees began to tremble.

It was the devil’s own path between the thick tree trunks. Don Alonso couldn’t see anything and kept going off the path. He had to pay attention. If he didn’t know every stone, he would have broken his neck long ago.

Something laughed next to him, and Alfonso almost dropped the corpse. He was so terrified. But he thought with lightning speed. The body can’t be discovered here! So, he continued on and a cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

Then he was out of the forest. But now came the place— if only Alonso was already past it —

The gallows hill. It is a hill that you could see from the city. Every month the citizens hung up two or three vagrants, thieves or other scoundrels to feast their eyes upon.

Alonso knew that there were three men hanging there right now. And he had to pass them. He didn’t feel very well when he thought about it.

And suddenly the moon emerged from the clouds. The entire area was suddenly white and bright. And Alonso realized that he was a hundred steps away from the gallows. The wind had also came out with the moon and the three men hanging on their ropes began to dance so that the knight could hear their bones clattering. It was a funny sound, but it made one shudder after another run through his body and his hair stood on end.

But he had to go past… There was no other way. Don Jose needed to die in the ravine. The harsh and jagged wounds from the rocks would hide the wound from the tip of his sword. Don Alonso pulled himself together and moved forward. But after fifty steps he stopped once more.

The gallows rose in front of him. The moonlight flowed down the support beams in silver streams. The tops of the crossbeams were broad, shiny pools. The skinny, wind dried leg bones clattered. Their hair was tangled in their faces. And those faces! Decay and the ravens had eaten large holes in them: The mouths, noses and eyes were just large holes!

They stared down so horribly from the gallows.

The knight shook. Once more a cold sweat broke out on his forehead and hands.

The wind became quite strong and spun the gallows brothers on their ropes. The tattered, weathered clothing fluttered. Don Alonso set down the dead man. With a shrug of his shoulder he threw him down on the path. Then he unwrapped his rosary from his wrist and began to pray.

First, he prayed for his own salvation— said a rosary, while the hanged men stared over at him— as if in remorse; their empty gazes seemed like requests. Then he started to pray for the salvation of the three hanging there above him. Said three rosaries for the three poor souls. He reeled off his prayers faster and faster. He needed to get away from there. Because it was getting more and more creepy. He called upon the mercy of God and asked for forgiveness. There was only one thought in his mind: If only it was over.

Finally, he was done. He took up the dead man once more. Placed the long, heavy body on his shoulder, with the head hanging down in back and the feet dangling down in front.

Then he continued on— with heavy, slow steps he trudged forward. Panting and laboriously, because the dead man weighed him down like a sack full of scrap iron.

As he passed the gallows… the hanged men clattered and spun like crazy.

The shadows of the three support beams fell diagonally across the path — Then… something made a terrible noise. A red flame erupted from out of the earth, boiling Sulphur vapors swelled up on all sides, and liquid pitch splashed into the knight’s face.

And in front of him stood — the devil.

In his right hand he had a terrible pitchfork. In his left he gracefully

held his tail in front of him. A long, red, glowing tongue stuck out of his mouth. On his breast was a large brand in the shape of a pentagram.

The devil scraped politely in greeting with his right foot stretched out in back.

“Come on, little brother! Oven number seven hundred, thirty-five thousand four hundred and thirty-six is waiting for you.”

The knight wanted to run, but he couldn’t move. In his deathly fear he took the body from his shoulder and held it in front of him like a shield with one hand on the collar and the other on the backside. The devil laughed and stretched out his dirty claws toward the corpse.

“I already have that one, now I want you.”

Then he tried to tear the body away from the knight. Alonso held on. So, they pulled for his dear life. On one side the devil and the knight on the other. Back and forth, so that the limbs of the dead man wriggled.

Suddenly the devil jerked hard, tore the corpse away from the knight and threw it into the ditch.

“Holy Mary! Screamed the knight and crossed himself.

But the devil just laughed and stretched out his claws for the neck of the knight—

Suddenly three fellows were standing there. Ragged, rattling, with clattering

bones and shredded faces— the three hanged men from the gallows.

They made very grim faces.

The devil became uneasy:

“What are you doing here? Go back home!”

But the fellows didn’t obey.

One calmly tore off his right leg. Another held his shoulder blade like a battle axe. The third took his head between his hands like a heavy throwing stone.

The devil became more uneasy:

“Go home, I say!”

“Oho!” grumbled the three with deep unearthly voices.

“Ah, you rabble, you scoundrels, you…!”

But the old gallows brother hit the devil on the head with his leg so hard that fire shot out from his eyes and left him speechless.

The devil jumped back and made the sign of dominion with his tail.

The three hanged men laughed in their deepest gallows’ bass. Then the

devil could see that he had lost his power over them. It frightened him. And made him wild at the same time. His eyes rolled like fiery wheels and he jabbed at the first fellow with his pitchfork.

But the other knocked it out of his hands with his shoulder blade and the third threw his head at the devil's head so hard that he couldn't see or hear anything.

Well, something like that.

And before the devil could come to his senses, the first one hit him again over the skull with his leg. The devil folded together and bit off his own tongue. It fell onto the path and rolled and slithered like a red fiery snake into the ditch, where it hissed and remained lying there where the devil could no longer get it.

The devil couldn't take any more. He tucked his tail between his legs and ran— as well as he could. His red tongue and the stench remained.

The knight turned to the hanged men. It occurred to him that he must thank them.

While he was still thinking of how to address them, the first one said:

"Thank you. Your prayers have freed us from hell."

Then he turned and walked up the gallows hill. He climbed onto the gallows like a ghostly cat, over the crossbeam to his nail— stuck his head back in the noose, jumped — hopped… and then dangled like before.

Alonso turns to the others, and the second one said:

"God has saved you through our intervention."

He turned around, walked up the hill, climbed onto the gallows… gave a hop… and dangled.

Alonso turned to the third. But he just said, "Go and change your ways".

Turned away… clambered up… gave a hop… dangled…

The knight stood there like a frozen chicken. He thought for a long time, but he didn't come to any conclusion.

What a remarkable story this would be!

Then before going back home he threw the corpse into the ravine.

In Honor of St. Dominic

When the brothers were seated in the dining room, and the bishop gave the signal to begin the meal from his golden high seat, one of the lay brothers came from the entrance, approached the brother porter, and quietly spoke a few words to him.

The first seated turned their heads toward the brother porter, and as the sun now lay on his white robe, it seemed as if they turned toward a sudden light. The brother porter rose and walked toward the prior, who had already begun to cut the reddish flesh of his fish. He stood silently and gravely behind the prior, waiting until the latter signaled him to speak. Then he spoke a few words with his cold mouth. It was like a miracle that the syllables could emerge between the narrow lips, that they did not freeze before they formed words.

The prior put down the broad spade and turned toward the bishop's high seat. Bowing low so that the tassels of the zingula dangled forward, he repeated what the brother porter had delivered to him. The bishop looked down for a moment, then raised his head and looked out of the high arched windows of the dining room at the city below in the bright southern sunlight. Around its flat roofs blossomed the trees of joy, and on the hills around lay the splendor of an inexhaustible serenity.

Then the bishop stood up, pushing the throne chair far behind him and raising his monstrous body above the table top. On his red face, besides the kindness of the careful shepherd of souls, there was the zeal of a brave fighter of the contending church.

Silence fell in the hall.

The bishop spoke: "My dear brothers, beloved in Christ. You faithful fighters for God's glory and for the continuance of his holy Church! Today is a day of joy and triumph for all the true believers in Christ, for the pious people who place their salvation in our hands, and for you, who, for the eternal salvation of the children of God, ceaselessly withstand the onslaught of darkness. In joyfulness of heart you are celebrating this day, venerable Dominican brothers, and your joyfulness smells good to heaven, because your founder, the most holy Dominic, has today received the palms of a life pleasing to God. The Holy Father has pronounced that it has pleased God. The Holy Father said that it pleased God to include your founder in the

ranks of the saints, so that he, together with the choirs of martyrs and holy warriors, may praise God from eternity to eternity. You have celebrated this day, and all of Christendom celebrates it with you, insofar as it has not been drawn into the pit of hell by the snares of Satan. This year of the Lord, twelve hundred and thirty-four, must be engraved with golden letters on the tablet of the history of our Church, the immutably faithful Bride of Christ. And I, Your Bishop. Raimundus de Miramonte, consider myself fortunate to have lived through this day, and I put on the ceremonial garments of my soul, just as the city has put on its ceremonial garments and adorned itself, so that it may openly testify its joy to you. But you know that the prince of darkness does not rest and shakes the foundations of our church; hell always spews forth new hordes of heretics, and the old lion goes roaring in the night, seeking to devour the children of God. Even in our pious city of Toulouse, under our watchful eyes, the works of the devil grow, and your restless efforts. You brave fighters of the Lord! In spite of that, the heresy raises its head and knows how to hide itself from your eyes. You are called *Domini canes*[5], well: you seek them out like dogs of the Lord. But seldom enough have you succeeded in hunting a game, because it knows how to hide itself well with the help of its prince, the Lord of Darkness. It has been moons since you last succeeded in finding a heretic and bringing him to justice. And now, on the honorary day of St. Dominic, I announce to you a miracle that was undoubtedly performed by your founder for the greater glorification of his name. A man, who offered his services to the Church and to the saint, who has dedicated himself to us and has already done invaluable work for us, has just brought us the news that he has scouted out an old heretic who is wrestling with death in her hut. Do you recognize in this sign the finger of God, who has never shown his pleasure in a saint as clearly as in St. Dominic? Your founder? We will follow God's beckoning and leave at once to go to her, and not a morsel of this meal shall pass our lips until we have done according to the will of God."

Then the brothers rose from their seats, and the wide dining hall of the monastery was filled with the noise of the departure. They arranged themselves into a long procession and silently strode like judges out of the shadow of the monastery into the sunny streets of the city. In front walked the bishop, who had thrown on a simple citizen’s garb, and at his side a small, misshapen man, who talked incessantly, and with hastily flung hands seemed to be continually invoking heaven and earth as witnesses of his

truthfulness.

In the streets through which the procession passed, life seemed to freeze. The traffic stopped for a moment, the noise of business and pleasure suddenly ceased, the laughter and shouting of the children died away, and everyone who saw the procession coming pressed himself against the wall of a house, bowed his head silently, and crossed himself before the stern and piercing gaze of the inquisitors.

Thus they reached the house of the old heretic. A poor, but cleanly whitewashed little house, which lay in the middle of a small garden outside the gates of the city. The Garonne flowed past it, and sometimes the wind carried its murmur. The monks and priests surrounded the house in the midst of the rich and flourishing life like a chain enclosing a spellbound place. Among the rosy cherry trees and the hard and dull green of the olives, the white and black robes of the monks appeared here and there.

The bishop opened the fence gate and strode alone through the noon-silent garden. Bees hovered above the blue bellflowers and the fair wildness of the flowerbeds. Their hum swam on the quietly flooding murmur of the Garonne.

The man in the clothes of a plain citizen entered the sickroom. The windows were covered with cloths, and only through one opening a ray of sunlight penetrated, striking the bishop's eye so that he had to stop, blinded.

Then a voice came from the darkness of the room, the languid, life-weary voice of a sick woman:

"Have you come, my brother, to look after me?"

And the bishop realized that there in the corner was a bed in which lay a woman. He stepped closer and saw the gaunt, hollow-eyed face of an old woman, marked with suffering and death. And posing as if he were the newly elected head of the heretical congregation, whom he knew the woman was expecting, he said:

"Greetings, my sister; painful is the duty that leads me to you, yet joyful also, for now you will enter into the eternal delights."

The sick woman was silent for a moment and looked up at him gratefully. Then she said:

"I am very happy that it was granted to me to see your face, because I heard many good things about our newly elected head. How sad it is that we hardly know each other, and that many of our brothers and sisters never see each other face to face in life."

"The persecution of the Dominicans is harsh and relentless, and the Bishop Raimundus de Miramonte is the worst enemy of the poor of Lyons. The greatest caution is needed; only in this way can we survive the persecution."

"The deluded ones! They think they serve God and serve the demon of hatred. God is love."

"So you are firm, Oh sister, in your faith; can nothing make you waver in it?"

"Nothing, my brother! I have lived twenty years of my life in our pure faith. I have become accustomed to endure all dangers and sufferings, and now, in the sight of death, should I tremble back or grow faint?"

"You are right, my sister, I hear you have always been zealous and strong in faith. You will not die with a lie. You will want to go before God pure and true."

The sick woman raised a trembling hand and grasped the fingers of the comforter.

"Pure and true," she said.

"So you hold to what Peter Waldus handed down to us as unadulterated Christianity? You reject indulgences and think purgatory is an invention of the Roman Catholic Church?"

"Yes!"

"You believe in the divine institution of the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of the altar, and reject all the rest as shameful falsifications of the true will of Christ?"

"Yes!"

"You are celebrating today in the city the canonization of Dominicus, who died 13 years ago in Bologna. You reject the veneration of the saints as paganism and idolatry?"

"Yes!"

"And you will hold fast to this faith of yours until death, and even at the moment when you stand before the judgment of God?"

"I will stand firm in my faith."

"So I tell you," and the bishop pushed back his misshapen body, "you are a heretic, what you have confessed is heresy. I am the Bishop Raimundus de Miramonte of Toulouse, and I teach the Roman Catholic faith."

There was silence in the room for a moment, and the bishop thought he

heard the murmur of the Garonne. But it was only the hum of blood in his ear. Then all at once the heretic laughed and half threw herself up with her upper body. Her eyes had come alive again, and the bishop saw the hand clench that lay in the middle of a small circle of light on the bedspread.

He turned away, stepped in front of the house and waved. Then the brothers came into the garden and with them a crowd of city servants who had been fetched in the meantime.

The bishop ordered the bed with the sick woman to be taken up and carried out, and loudly proclaimed the praises of St. Dominic, who had taken such a stubborn and dangerous heretic into his hands. The dying woman looked with a mild smile at the trees and flowers of her garden, which she had thought she would never see again.

She saw the rosy blossoms of the cherry trees and felt all the sweetness of spring, by whose miracle she was now carried to death. Only the buzzing of the bees and the sound of the Garonne could not be heard, for now the garden was filled with the clatter of weapons and the harsh voices of the monks.

The mild smile remained on her face as she was carried on her bed through the streets of the city, and as she saw life freeze wherever the train went. And she smiled when, in the main square, in the open air, the Dominican Inquisition Court convened. The bishop wished it so, because the miracle of St. Dominic should be known to all men, for the glory of the true and only Church and for the terror of her enemies and all heretics.

The sun had passed its highest point, and already the high gabled roofs of the houses on the west side were casting their strangely jagged shadows over the square. Here the city servants enclosed a space in the middle of which the members of the heretic court took their places. They lined up around the bed of the dying woman, to which the bishop approached.

All around, an immense crowd of people was waiting with horror and curiosity.

When the bishop raised his hand, it became so quiet that one could clearly hear the rumbling of the wooden blocks that were already piled up at the far end of the square to form the funeral pyre. Raimundus de Miramonte pronounced his grave accusation and continued:

"Although a further repetition, confirmation and affirmation does not seem necessary, because the confession made before a priest of the Roman church is to be regarded as a fully valid proof, we want to ask the question

here once again, whether the heretic persists in her false faith; because the church must give even the worst sinner the opportunity to come back into her bosom and die converted. So I ask you, do you repent of your false faith and return to the dear Mother?"

Then the heretic smiled calmly, and it was like the reflection of a distant radiance was in her eyes. Into the great silence that awaited her answer, in which only the rumbling of the logs from the pyre was audible, she said in a clear voice:

"No!"

Then a wave of horror and admiration roared over the wide square, and the Inquisition court pronounced her guilty of heresy and handed her over to the secular judge, who obediently broke the baton. The dying woman was placed in her bed on the funeral pyre and the pitch-covered woodpile was set on fire. And Death changed his face and the slow creeper became the red strangler. But the woman kept her wits about her and smiled and sang softly to herself. A spiritual song of comfort and a simple lullaby, which she had once sung to her only son, who had died by fire ten years ago in the same place.

When everything was over, and the woodpile burned in the hot afternoon sun, the friars returned to the monastery and all praised the miracle and the great power of St. Dominic.

With great cheerfulness in their hearts, they took their places in the wide dining room, from whose windows the friendly city and the glittering Garonne were far overlooked. And when the covered dishes were served again, it proved that the food was still fresh and warm by the power of St. Dominic, and that the short absence of the brothers had not harmed their goodness.

Bimbus.

Since the death of her husband, Mrs. Genovefa Plotzar had lived alone in the small suburban house.

A small house, situated in the middle of a large, overgrown garden, which was closed off from the street by a high wall. All around were gardens, yards, and gardens again, all the way to the other side of the street, from which the ringing and humming of the electric train could be heard on quiet summer evenings.

Old Plotzar had his peculiarities after the manner of all old pensioners. Mrs. Plotzar understood him; she used to say with a wistful smile, "You were a civil servant; you had to live after other people's manner all your forty years of service, now you shall live after your own naughtiness." Then her husband laughed and gallantly kissed her hand. For he had forgotten how he had rebelled wildly and desperately against the foreign yoke at the beginning. His wife, however, had not forgotten.

The two childless people had saved up a small capital during the man's forty years of service. When Plotzar had paid his farewell visit to the Privy Councilor and had given the last tip to the usher, he held out his arm to his wife, who was waiting for him under the gate of the provincial court building, and went with her to look for an apartment.

"You know what? Hm . . ." he cleared his throat and spat.

"Well, what?"

"How about we buy our own place. Now we've been slaving away in tenements long enough!"

"Oh, you, that would be nice . . ." she clung tenderly and more tightly to his arm.

"Now I'm a free man; I want a free home."

"You dear," Mrs. Genovefa was almost beautiful in her touching love.

"It ought to be in a garden. Surrounded by gardens. It needs to be quiet. ."

"Yes. yes . . ."

So they bought the little house in the suburbs. It was actually quite uncomfortable. More like a farmhouse than suitable for the needs of a city dweller. But old Plotzar was pleased with it. He changed very little about it

and took pleasure, when the visitors could not find their way around the nooks and crannies of the old house. He himself walked around all the rooms all day, walked in the garden, tended his rosebushes and slept in the arbor of wild vines on hot summer afternoons.

Three years this peaceful joy lasted. Then, one sunny spring Sunday at three o'clock in the afternoon, he pressed his wife's hand and slumbered away.

Now Mrs. Genovefa was alone. She felt the loneliness of the old house like a desolate noise. She could not believe that her husband had left her. And she had all his noises in her ears, his rumbling in the corners, his clearing his throat and coughing, his humming and scratching. She strained to hear things from the past, and lived with her soul in the distant days.

But soon the strain on her old heart began to weaken. The images faded and the sounds died away. Quietly, very quietly, the past sank beneath the surface of this life, and sparse as its trickle was, it rushed over her.

At that time, Mrs. Genovefa felt the need to have someone around her with whom she could talk, and who could read to her. The old housemaid, who did not understand a word of German and was also hard of hearing, could not be considered a social being. She belonged more to the kitchen utensils.

She let her relatives pass before her eyes: her brother-in-law Heinrich! He was an old bachelor and would have very strange ideas. No - she could not use old people, she wanted to have youth and strength around her.

Then her sister Helene. An old, dried-up spinster. No, no, no - nothing wilted. Withering.

There was her other sister Anna, the wife of a small railroad official. Seven children! If one of them were taken from her, she would be quite happy. A girl, of course. Sophie ... Rosa ... Ada...! Ada, she must be sixteen years old now. Five years ago she was a charming, red-cheeked, blond-haired little girl of eleven ... yes, eleven years old! So now sixteen. Oh, yes ... how time flies.

So Mrs. Genovefa wrote to her sister Anna. She agreed, of course. Thus life and youth came into the quiet suburban house.

But soon Mrs. Genovefa realized that she was unable to bear the noise and brightness of youth. Ada longed for light and the noise of the world. The house and the garden soon became much too cramped for her. She was quite sad and cried because her aunt had no understanding for the inhibited

strength of her youth. She lost the beautiful, harmless openness with which she had met Mrs. Genovefa. A dark veil drew over her soul, behind which she hid herself.

Then Mrs. Genovefa allowed her to take piano lessons and learn to sew white linen. Ada was now on her course without supervision.

But soon the old woman noticed that Ada was abusing her freedom. She had established a secret relationship with a high school student and held meetings with him in the evenings. Once, Mrs. Genovefa thought she had surprised the girl in the garden during a tryst. She heard a furtive whispering from the arbor, and as she approached, a dark figure took flight, broke through the bushes, and climbed away over the garden fence.

Mrs. Genovefa had much trouble and little joy with her new housemate. She drew on her old strength instead of drawing new strength from Ada's youth.

At last she sent the girl back to her mother.

Now she was alone again in the old suburban cottage, whose silence weighed more oppressively on her than before.

Stronger than ever, after this brief interruption of her solitude, the memory of her husband emerged again from the past. Strangely, she felt much closer to the deceased than she had ever felt since his death. So close that she sometimes thought she could feel a faint breeze or a very, very soft whisper, as if someone next to her were speaking her name.

Sad, sad, so deadly sad it was.

Gloomy thoughts clutched at the old woman. And often she felt as if there were a monstrous spider's web around her, in which she was becoming more and more entangled . . . gray threads all around her body. And often, when she sat in her recliner and turned her back to the door, she felt very clearly how the door opened and something slowly approached her chair with inaudible steps. She jumped up with a scream and looked around. There was nothing.

And in her anxiety and fears she had no one who could have comforted her, who could have scared away her imagination and strengthened her courage. She could only speak a little with her housemaid. And she had never spoken to anyone else in the whole city. She did not want to make a new acquaintance right now.

This overstimulation of her nerves would pass. Above all, it was necessary to set up another room as a sleeping chamber. Since the death of

her husband, Mrs. Genovefa still slept in the old bedroom. His bed still stood there, even though she had it moved away from hers and placed in a distant corner of the room. This was where his coffin had stood, and the haze of the candles had not left the room for days afterward.

It was clear to Mrs. Genovefa that she would have to have her bed removed from this room. It was terrible to her and seemed like a betrayal of the 'dead. But it had to be done. She had the most terrible dreams here every night. Almost every time, the stretcher was the focus of her horrified dream fantasies. She was convinced that if she slept on the second floor for a few months -- in the blue room with the three windows -- all these fears would pass.

Tomorrow the changing of rooms was to be done. But the night before, something strange and frightening happened. Mrs. Genovefa dreamed that she was taking an evening walk with her husband. It was a wonderful summer evening. It was as it had often really been. They came to the front of the city and to a monstrous tall building lost high up in the clouds. Mrs. Genovefa had never seen this building before. The wall formed a smooth surface, unbroken by any opening. Nor were there any joints in the stones; it was as if the wall consisted of brazen plates welded together. Finally they discovered a very low entrance door. They felt around at the door, because they were curious to see what this building contained. Suddenly the door burst open and they stepped into an endlessly long, low corridor, illuminated by a glimmer from somewhere. They did not ask, and walked on side by side, as naturally as if they knew that from now on, the path would lead deeper and deeper into the interior of this burrow. It became darker and darker, and soon the woman could no longer see the man at her side. She became tired and a great fear overcame her. And then she suddenly heard the man say in a completely changed, strange voice:

"This is the palace of death."

The words struck her like red-hot iron, and with a cry she wanted to cling to her companion. She felt him slip from her hands and sink at her side. She wanted to pull him up, but a force pulled him to the depths.

She only heard his indistinct and desperate murmur, "This is the palace of death."

Then all was over. Then such a horror came over her that, crying out loudly, she turned toward the exit and ran back down the long corridor. The open door at the exit shone like a distant pinpoint of light. She flew so fast

... yes, she really flew . . . her feet did not touch the floor.... so fast that the streaks of light on the dark walls flowed into each other to form long ribbons. But it seemed as if the light dots always remained the same distance away. Then she was seized by an even more terrible fear: I'm going to be late ... the door is going to close..... Then I am lost. For she suddenly knew that the door would close again by itself after a short time. And she also knew this time was over. She flew along so fast that her head buzzed… The door came closer. The dot of light became a pane, the pane became a square opening, and then she stepped into the glimmer of daylight . . . quickly . . . quickly . . . just quickly ... ... almost ... then a black wall slid in front of the light with a crash. . . deeply and eerily the roar reverberated in the long corridor. She sank to the floor and lost consciousness.

But in an instant she jolted up again. In the bedroom, the pale glow of dawn was spreading. And over there, her husband's portrait was lying on the floor - an expensive oil painting costing 45 guilders, with a torn canvas and a broken frame. She got out of bed and carefully examined whether the hook in the wall had loosened. The hook was stuck in the wall and was fixed. The ring on the picture frame had not come loose either. She stood and stared at the empty space next to her own portrait.

Then she crawled back into bed once more without having touched her husband's portrait. With her eyes wide open, she lay there for another hour without moving. She did not dare to put a finger under the blanket and only got up when she heard the housemaid ringing at the door of the anteroom.

She stayed near the hard-of-hearing woman all morning and followed her as if under a spell into the kitchen, into the cellar, into all the rooms. Only the bedroom she did not enter with a single step.

When the woman brought the broken portrait out of the room with a puzzled, stupid smile, she made her understand that she should fetch the gilder in the afternoon.

After lunch, two servants came and began to move the most important bedroom furniture into the blue room. She also had the iron safe, in which Genovefa kept the securities and savings bank books, carried out.

Towards evening everything was ready. The housemaid still had to deal with a few smaller pieces of furniture.

Finally, the doorbell rang. Mrs. Genovefa opened it.

"Is this where Mrs. Plotzar lives!"

"Yes. Are you the gilder?"

"Yes!" And the man entered.

A pale face with a thin blond mustache, his hair standing on all sides. His face was riven with pockmarks. Unpleasant, piercing eyes with which he stared fixedly at the woman. So firmly that it almost jolted her like a physical pain.

She led him into the bedroom, which now looked a bit desolate and empty. The painting stood with the picture side leaning against the wall.

"Aha, that one!"

And he turned it around.

He looked at it intently in the twilight of the evening.

"That's the late husband."

"Yes!"

"When did he die?"

"Several years ago."

"And where did the picture hang before?"

Mrs. Genovefa showed the man the place. The gilder climbed up on a chair and checked the firmness of the hook. "Hmm," he made as he climbed down.

"And the picture fell down for the first time last night?"

"Last night . . ."

"Yes, last night! It fell down last night, didn't it?"

"Yes, towards morning . . ." and then she added as if she wanted to quickly catch up with the answer to his question "for the first time."

"Hm," said the gilder again, going to the window with the picture and looking at it again very attentively.

Mrs. Genovefa felt quite anxious.

Twilight crept around in all corners of the room, gray, gloomy, and intangible, like a dark foreboding. The objects lost their sharp boundaries and stretched carelessly into the room. The man's sharp profile stood out against the evening sky, a piece of which peeked out from between the treetops. Mrs. Genovefa became more and more confused. She was alone here with the strange man.

Then the door was opened and the housemaid called out her goodnight greeting.

Mrs. Genovefa was startled.

She heard the anteroom door slam outside.

Then the man slowly turned his face toward her:

"Was the deceased a good man ... I mean, did he like you?"

What kind of strange questions were these? What business was it of the gilder? He should make his frames and not worry about anything else! Mrs. Genovefa wanted to turn him away quite abruptly. But she did not find the tone. And her answer sounded very polite, almost despondent.

"He loved me very much!"

"This is where your bed used to be?" He pointed to the oblong square, which stood out darker against the light painting of the floor. "And there ... on the wall ... the bedside table! Wasn't it! And here? ..."

In Mrs. Genovefa a hostile disgust against the questioner glowed. But she was under a compulsion that robbed her of the freedom of her will. Hesitatingly, as if from a failing spring, it came out of her:

"And here-"

Then with a jerk: "A closet."

"A strongbox?"

The gilder stepped once more under the picture hook, looked at it and shook his head. Then, with a brief nod toward the bed, he asked, "That's where the deceased's bed is?"

"Yes!"

He pulled a red flowered cloth from his pocket and wrapped the picture in it. Then he took his soft, crumpled cap and excused himself. When Mrs. Genovefa followed him through the garden to lock the front door, everything seemed so changed to her. The formerly so familiar bushes rustled behind her like evil spirits and the old chestnut trees beat their branches confusedly and senselessly.

The sand of the path crunched hostilely, and all the sounds of the garden seemed to be in tune with the dark figure before her. An agreement that was directed against her like a secret conspiracy.

When the dewy branch of a gooseberry bush brushed her hand as she passed, she cried out softly, and was startled even more when the man turned around and politely asked if the gracious lady was missing anything. The way to the garden gate seemed to her endless and full of insidious dangers from which the man in front could not give her any protection.

Then he stood in the open garden gate and greeted her once more silently. From the street the palliated glow of the summer day penetrated into the cool garden. That glow of sun-drenched stones that still make the evening and half nights hot.

The iron-clad door slammed heavily into the lock. Mrs. Genovefa stood pondering for a moment.

Her heart was heavy again: now she was all alone, all alone. And what if one day the housemaid were to open the garden gate with her second key and unlock the front gate and ring the bell at the front room door..... And no one would open the door for her . .... Because ... because ... because the lonely woman was lying in bed inside..... All stiff and cold!

In this thought she froze.

Slowly, with dragging steps she went back; full of fear of the never heard sounds of the garden, which had no friendliness for her anymore. She pushed past the arbor ... She thought of the man who once sat in there and read or slept. And of the youth for whom this place had been a welcome hiding place for its reeling abundance.

Mrs. Genovefa had another bad night. The new surroundings did not allow her to sleep, and in the few hours in which fatigue overcame her fear, she continued to live in a mysterious dream life full of terrible turmoil and anxiety.

The next morning she asked her housemaid who the gilder had been.

"Dominik Bauer from the Kreuzgasse!"

"Dominik Bauer from Kreuzgasse! I don't know him!"

"He's only been here a month."

"So."

Mrs. Genovefa was not as indifferent to the matter as she pretended. It seemed to her a strange coincidence that Fanny had just fetched this gilder, who had only very recently moved over here. A chain of necessities that inevitably had to lead to a goal.

But she was not able to recognize this goal. It seemed to blur in a completely disembodied fog. The old woman Genovefa got into a state of excitement, which expressed in her as an anxious expectation.

She waited for three days. The gilder did not bring back the painting. The woman's nights were heavy and full of ghastly dreams. It seemed to her that only the strange man knew how to help her.

At the end of the week she sent the housemaid to the gilder and asked when the painting would be ready. And the next day - it was a Sunday morning - he brought it himself, wrapped in the same red, flowered cloth.

She led him into the former bedroom, which she had not entered since then, and moved a chair to the wall where the picture used to hang.

But the gilder looked at her and hesitated.

Then he said slowly, "I think it will fall down again." He said this so strangely and with such conviction that Mrs. Genovefa looked at him dreamily.

"Well," he said, as if in answer to a silent question, "I don't think he wants to stay here!"

"Tell me for God's sake . . .”

"I think he has something to tell you."

"Who, Jesus . . . don't torture me like this . . . You're so strange."

"Who, your late husband! Don't you already know?"

I don't know anything."

"All these dreams, these signs . . ., these fears. It's all from him."

"Yes ... and what am I supposed to do? How can I ..."

"You should call him!"

"Call? From where?"

"From there!"

And Bauer pointed with an indefinite gesture to an upper corner of the room.

"How can that happen? Who can call the deceased?"

"Well, for example - I can!"

The man fixed his piercing eyes on the woman and held her will with that look. Mrs. Genovefa, who suddenly felt in herself a doubt and choking disgust, surrendered to his inner strength and submitted without contradiction. She no longer dared to think against him, for - it was quite strange - every such attempt hurt her physically.

"Have you never heard of mediums? They are people whom the spirits make use of in order to appear."

Mrs. Genovefa nodded. She had probably read enough about it in the newspapers, and had also talked about it with her husband from time to time, but both had dismissed it out of hand as a hoax. Now a man stood before her who spoke of these things with deep earnestness, and whom she had to believe; she might also resist it unconsciously, but his rule allowed none of these doubts to become conscious.

"This becomes so hard for most to believe. And yet is actually so easy. In Allan Kardec you will find all this. Man consists, of body and soul. Well, that one learns in the school. But that there is a third, a third between body and soul, only we know. This third is the astral body. The astral body

consists of ether, of luminous fluid, and through it the spirit is able to reveal its potencies. In the astral body he appears. Mediums, that is people who have a surplus of this fluid, so that they can give off of it, offer the spirits the possibility to get in touch with us."

"And you are such a medium?"

"Yes, the newspapers scream about frauds and rejoice when once somewhere a fraud is exposed. As if there weren't frauds among the state officials, the bank directors, and the theater artists. But is the whole profession to be condemned right away? No, it does not mean that all bank directors are frauds when one of them commits fraud. But it is said that all media are swindlers, when a crook, who does not deserve the name of our state, is caught in his crookedness. Spiritism is a science that Du Prel established philosophically, Aksakow experimentally. One will have to get used to reckoning with this science."

He had spoken full of zeal and very quickly, like one who has said the same thing many times before and who counts on the fact that his listener himself has already been very much occupied with these things.

Mrs. Genovefa asked shyly again: "And so the spirit of my . . . my husband could appear and tell me -"

The gilder's eyes flashed: "Yes."-.

But still the woman was not completely subject to his will, and she let the man hang the picture in its place and go away.

Some days passed - Mrs. Genovefa in restlessness, some nights in agony and trepidation. One night she woke up to strange noises in the bedroom that was under the blue room. She heard muffled moaning. Walking back and forth and scraping against the walls; then a thump. And then there was silence. Mrs. Genovefa sat upright in bed for a while, listening. But nothing more stirred. The exhaustion of her overtired nerves sank her into a heavy sleep. But when, in the morning, old Fanny rushed in with a contorted face and reported that the picture of the deceased gentleman was already lying on the floor again, Mrs. Genovefa was confronted once again with the whole horror of the previous night, and at the same time she realized that she was at the edge of her strength.

She sent the housemaid to Dominik Bauer and asked him to come to her.

Dominik Bauer came, even paler and shaggier than usual.

"My husband's picture has fallen off the wall again," she said.

"I thought so and told you so."

"So you think my husband has something to tell me?"

"I believe it."

"Good ... No sacrifice is too hard for my husband. Tell me, what should I do?"

"Do you want to confide in me?"

"Yes.

"Then I will try to summon him. I'll come to see you tomorrow night. Don't eat meat all day, keep a diet. It is best if you take only water and fruit. You won't believe how digestion affects the manifestations of the intelligences."

Mrs. Genovefa ate only fruits throughout the day. While doing so, she was so excited that her toothless jaws beat against each other as if in a strong frost. With the breaking of dusk, the gilder also came. She was waiting for him in the garden when she saw his dark figure gliding towards her. The garden gate did not creak - and his sudden appearance had something of the emergence of a demon about it. It seemed to the woman as if a net of threads was winding around her, the center of which was formed by his dark body. It approached her almost inaudibly and she shrank back from it as from the touch of an eerie animal. And yet she could not move from the spot. Then he stood before her, and when she stared at his eyes, all reluctance disappeared.

"Good evening! Let's go into the house, it's cool out here."

They entered the bedroom. Mrs. Genovefa felt cold and shivered.

But the man reassured her, "Don't be afraid, madam, the spirit is kind to you."

In the twilight, the boundaries of the room seemed to lose themselves in the infinite. Mrs. Genovefa stood in the middle of the room as if in a vast, barren plain. Never before had she felt the consciousness of loneliness so strongly and overwhelmingly as here, where the darkness and the horror assailed her.

Suddenly she felt a hand grasping hers, and a warm, invigorating current flowing into her. And feelings of gratitude rose up in her, scaring away her fear and giving her peace, security and trust in this strange man. She forgot all at once that she was alone in the house and that she did not know this man at all.

The gilder pulled a light table from a corner and placed it in the middle

of the room. Then they both sat down, facing each other, and put their hands on the tabletop so that their fingertips touched. The mystery of the process, the silence and the darkness affected the woman and confused her old, seventy-four-year-old head.

She waited.

A distant light flashed between the dark trees of the garden. It came from one of the back houses, and Mrs. Genovefa looked at the bright dot as if under a spell. What was happening in this light? What was the thin glow illuminating? A peaceful family picture, the mother at the table, busy with the evening meal. Or an ugly scene between husband and wife ... Curses, swear words, blows. Or a pair of lovers . . .

Through the half-open window came the singing of a maid in one of the neighboring gardens.

Suddenly it was to her as if all the singing and lying, gardens and houses, spread out into a flat plain where sounds and colors lay flat with objects equal to each other. It was strange that she did not wonder about it. And at the same time she had the feeling that it was strange not to be surprised about it.

The plain began to slope, and Mrs. Genovefa felt all at once that she was sliding down this sloping surface. Slowly at first, then faster. In a strange stiffness, always perpendicular to the inclined plane and faster the more inclined the plane became. The gliding became a frantic movement, a stormy flying, and suddenly Mrs. Genovefa felt that she had passed a lowest point and was now whizzing upward. The inclined plane was therefore a slide. There was something ridiculous about this thought, and Mrs. Genovefa tried to laugh. But the laughter slipped like silk from her cheeks and was lost in a new, unknown feeling: the feeling of floating. Plain. Slope, Gardens. Sounds and lights remained behind, and Mrs. Genovefa floated up. Quietly and straight as a candle.

But then she realized all at once that she was not floating, but sitting firmly in front of the little table in the middle of the bedroom, and that this little table was moving upwards. Her hands slid down from the edges, and lifted by an invisible force, the table floated up toward the ceiling of the room. The twilight filling the room seemed to the woman like the substance of a milk glass before it condensed into a hard, smooth pane. Through these masses surging through each other, she saw the little table float free in the air. At the same time she felt a tingling in the arms from the elbows to the

fingertips. As if from the light strokes of a small electrifying machine.

Then the table lowered again.

And when it was before them, and they had again both laid hands on it, the gilder began in a strange voice:

"Is there an intelligence here?"

The little table rose at one of the corners adjacent to Mrs. Genovefa and lowered with a rapid swoop.

And Bauer whispered mysteriously, "That means yes."

Then he continued in an incantatory tone, "Are you the husband of this woman?"

The table remained silent. Bauer repeated, "Is the gentleman the husband of this woman?"

The table tapped, "Yes."

And Bauer explained, "He is proud; I must speak formally to him. So he is an intelligence of a higher degree." Then he asked again, "What is your name?"

A chain of knocks read. In a rhythm unintelligible to Mrs. Genovefa, punctuated by single longer and shorter pauses. Bauer spelled out, "B-i-m-b-u-s. Bimbus! His name is: Bimbus! Next: do you want to answer us?"

Nothing. The table remained silent. They waited a while longer. But the table remained silent. Bauer stood up. It had become quite dark. Only outside, above the garden trees, the vague twilight still waved that makes the summer nights not quite dark. From the darkness of the room and the treetops the head of the man rose, like the head of a beast, whose body is darkness and whose voice is silence. Beside him burned a brightly shining a star.

"Is it already over?"

"Yes, madam, he cannot say any more today. We don’t want to force the spirits."

Mrs. Genovefa was trembling in all her limbs. She had expected the spirit to soothe her tormented soul, but it had plunged her into even greater horror.

When the man was gone and she sat alone in her blue room, she hardly dared to breathe. She tried to persuade herself that the certainty of the existence of a spirit world had so much that was wonderful and comforting. So it was a life after death. And yet she feared this mysterious realm, into which she had had a first glimpse today. She feared death as the gateway to

this kingdom. And from the hand that wanted to reach out from the dark beyond to hers, she retreated in the shiver of life. So she sat staring into the blue flames of the spirit burner on which she was boiling water for tea. But as it bubbled and hissed in the pot, she could not bring herself to get up and get what she needed to make the tea. She let the flames go out, the water grow cold, and listened only to the soft sounds of the night in the walls and floor and in the bedroom below.

The next morning plunged her into new horror. She found her husband's bed open, the pillows and blankets rumpled, and in the springs the impression of a body.

Bauer did not act at all surprised when she told him about it. He said she must now be prepared to meet the ghost sometimes as a housemate. As long as it continued with such harmless signs, one could accept it. By the way, he did not believe that it should ever become malevolent, because intelligences of a higher kind were free from the low malice of mean spirits, which consists only of throwing around pieces of coal and kitchen utensils.

Mrs. Genovefa could not wait for the next meeting. But Bauer said that Bimbus should not be pushed too hard. In the meantime, the ghost continued his visits to the bedroom. Mrs. Genovefa once found flowers on the table . . . Garden flowers. . . . Carnations and mignonettes from the bed next to the arbor.

Then again, the bed was rumpled, or the portrait of the deceased was on the large tiled stove.

The excitement of the old woman rose more and more and the gilder's reassuring coaxing could not change her mind, so that he finally decided to hold a second session. Although, as he said, it was not yet time.

Bauer completely darkened the room this time, covering the windows with black cloths and plugging every crack. Then the two sat down at the little table, and Mrs. Genovefa soon felt it slip from her hands and float up into the air.

Then Bimbus introduced himself.

Bauer asked him if he had anything to say to his wife?

“Yes."

Whether it was something very important?

"Yes!"

Whether it concerned this life or the existence beyond?

"Both," knocked the table. But the spirit was silent when asked what it

was. Then the gilder asked him if perhaps he would like to show himself once.

"Yes"

"Quiet now," whispered the man.

And Mrs. Genovefa stared into the darkness with the most rapt attention. Before her eyes appeared a dancing flame of red and green sparks. At first they appeared on the black velvet of the night like luminous dots. Then they began to approach each other and to revolve around each other in the manner of double stars, changing incessantly, so that soon one, soon the other star formed the center. A vortex, which became more and more powerful. The sparks united to form spirals, to circles, to arabesques and their brightness grew. Already the darkness gave way to a vague glow, an illuminated surface spread out before the eyes of the woman. A surface, which was not larger, than the dull full moon in misty spring nights, with blurry outlines, nevertheless not the hundredth part as bright as the moon. And suddenly the thought of the moon's face was connected to the woman's imagination. Like a face it seemed to stare at her from the bright disk.

Features . . . Facial features that changed . . . and now . . . Jesus . . . Maria. . The face of her dead husband. There he stood in the corner of the room . . . motionless . . . the pale face illuminated from the inside out and wrapped from head to toe in a white cloth that completely hid the figure.

At the same time, a horrible silence.

Mrs. Genovefa could no longer control herself ... a soft whimper of fear escaped her. Then the spirit slowly raised a shadowy arm toward her, and something dark fell to the ground.

To Mrs. Genovefa it was as if a large black cloth suddenly descended over the figure, and she lost consciousness.

When she awoke, she saw the gilder struggling around her by the dim light of a candle. She rose trembling from her chair and asked, "What . . . what . . . was that?"

Bauer handed her some dark, almost black roses, "He brought you this. It is a sign that he is good to you."

Mrs. Genovefa recognized the flowers of her garden. They were roses from her husband's favorite vine. -

Intercourse with the other world acted on the old woman like an intoxicating but destructive poison. It excited her mind to feverish activity, but it destroyed her body. An unhealthy blush glowed on her withered

cheeks, and her liveliness had something of the sickness of electrified animals. Her sharpened and at the same time confused senses heard sounds and saw colors they had never seen. All day long she heard grinding, shuffling and whispering around her; in the corners of the old house she saw gray shadows like webs of fog. Her emotional dark moods returned, in which she thought she was brushed by a foreign breeze and sensed someone behind her chair.

The dead things had gained life for her, and sometimes it seemed to her as if the old grandfather clock under the glass lintel was always wagging its head like an old mother, or as if a long, red tongue suddenly stretched out of the ornate corner of the chest of drawers, reaching down to the earth.

The almost withered imagination of the old woman had suddenly received a new, powerful impulse. She fell into a frenzy, which tore her around all the more strongly, as it was no longer offered a balancing counterweight by any firm willpower.

In the process, she deteriorated physically with uncanny speed. She emaciated so quickly that her clothes soon began to bag around her haggard body. Her weakness was so great that the coffee cup in her hand trembled, and she spilled half of the contents on the way to her mouth. When the paroxysms of her clairvoyance and clairaudience came, she stood upright and firm. But then the backlash hit her all the harder.

More than ever, she felt the need to have someone around her all the time.

Her old housemaid agreed to move in with her. But Bauer shook his head apprehensively when Mrs. Genovefa told him of her intention. He doubted whether Bimbus would agree. The spirit would have to be consulted first.

Bimbus had been appearing more and more frequently lately, making his presence known in the strangest of ways. Sometimes he could be heard playing the guitar under the bed, sometimes flowers fell from the ceiling of the room, then again in the morning all the furniture of the bedroom was found in other places. Bimbus had also begun to write. Bauer used to ask the ghost first if he wanted to write, and then put paper and pencil on the table for him. One heard the eager scratching of the spirit and when light was then made, one saw the answer in large, angular crow's feet on the paper. Of course, one had to look at the writing in the mirror, because the spirit wrote through the table, from below - as Bauer explained the

phenomenon - and so mirror writing had to be created.

Mrs. Genovefa behaved after the manner of incurable morphinists. She knew that intercourse with the spirit was harming her, but she could not let it go.

When Bauer was absent for two or three days, she sent Fanny to him. The sessions became more frequent and the intercourse with Bimbus more intimate. Even Bauer was allowed to call him "You". But since then the spirit had not shown itself physically again.

Summer had passed, and autumn had arrived with its bright colors in the gardens all around, when Mrs. Genovefa made the plan to take her servant into the house. But she had long since become accustomed to making all the little resolutions of her daily life dependent on the decision of the spirit, and would not have dared to carry out a great plan without Bimbus' consent.

Mrs. Genovefa could hardly wait for the evening. She confessed to herself that she would be quite uncomfortable if Bimbus said no. She imagined it so comfortable to always have someone around her who could give her the little assists that she needed during the day. She wanted to set up the small anteroom next to the blue room as Fanny's bedroom. There she could call the old woman if she became too frightened during the night.

The old woman was hard of hearing and understood only a few words of German. But - my God! - She was a lively person. Of course, Mrs. Genovefa would have liked it best if Bauer himself had moved in with her. For he understood the spirit and its needs best. But Bauer had his job and his family - a wife and seven children. There was no way that would have worked. Mrs. Genovefa would not have dared to start with that. It would have seemed a bit too intrusive to her. She had to be grateful to her husband and not make too many demands on him. After all, what did Bauer get out of it? He did it nevertheless really only from interest in the thing and in her. The two hundred or three hundred guilders that Mrs. Genovefa gradually handed over to him in small amounts as compensation for time and effort could not seriously be regarded as remuneration. And this small consideration was not able to stifle the deep feeling of gratitude in Mrs. Genovefa that she had for this man. He had given the evening of her life a meaning. He had enabled her to have intercourse with her husband, with Bimbus.

So, one should not be immodest.

In any case, it was best if old Fanny stayed with her. If only Bimbus said yes!

Mrs. Genovefa was very excited. But Bimbus did not agree. Bauer had foreseen it correctly. When in the evening, after the dark session, they lighted and looked at the writing of the spirit in the mirror, there it was written clearly in the angular letters, torn as if by secret travail:

"Not old Fanny. Bimbus wants rest."

Mrs. Genovefa was a little crestfallen. But Bauer comforted her. Who knows whether Bimbus would not then have moved away altogether or turned his friendly demeanor into the opposite? One already had examples of such transformations. Only recently it had happened in Breslau that the good spirit of the thirteen-year-old daughter had suddenly become mischievous and gleeful. And why? Because the parents had given away Rolf, the large Newfoundland dog that the child had been so fond of during her lifetime.

Mrs. Genovefa allowed herself to be reassured.

But very soon something happened that made her regret not having taken old Fanny to herself.

One moonlit night the old woman suddenly awoke. With her always lively ghostly intuition, she immediately listened intently to all the noises of the night and the old house. Nothing moved. She was already falling asleep again, but then she started up again. Her left hand grasped something icy and rigid. With a jerk, she sat upright in bed. She realized that she had grasped her own right hand, which had become completely dead and cold during her sleep. The fright had completely emboldened her.

The moon shone through the thin curtains and its light lay in vague, cranky patches over the furniture and the floor.

Mrs. Genovefa looked about her and stroked her thin white hair. Everything was in its place. There was the sewing table, there was the coffee machine on the breakfast table, there was the birdcage with the little canary in it, sitting plumped up on its perch.

But suddenly . . . it went through her heart like the prick of a cold, sharp needle.

A noise on the stairs outside.

"Jesus in heaven!"

Footsteps coming up. But it was not so much the sound of footsteps as just a faint echo. Creaking of the stairs, a whispering and grinding and in

addition a distant, very distant clanking, as of iron chains.

Something was coming up the stairs. It had never happened at night before. During the day, she often thought she could feel the spirit and its work everywhere. But he had never left the former bedroom at night.

Mrs. Genovefa counted: twenty-eight steps led to the first floor. Now the sounds were in the middle of the stairs. Fourteen more steps . . . then it was upstairs. Then across the short hallway . . Then at the door. The old woman tried to scream. She felt as if this could not be the spirit of her husband; she was familiar with that, she did not fear that. But she knew that there were evil demons, hostile spirits. Opponents of the good intelligences of her husband's kind, those who took pleasure in killing the darlings of the world, of the higher spirits to torment and frighten her. Bauer had often enough exposed this to her in the endless conversations of their twilight hours.

And she remembered, with her mind suddenly sharpened by fear, that he had once told her that it had never happened that anyone who had intercourse with the spirit world had remained untroubled by the doings of the lower demons.

The sounds had come closer . . . now almost at the top of the stairs.

She now clearly distinguished individual components of this mixture of horrible sounds: the neighing of a horse, the crowing of a rooster, the dull stomping as of hooves, and above all this terrible rattling and clanking of chains.

That was an evil demon coming to visit her. And Bauer wasn't here, and Fanny wasn't here, and no human. . no one. no one . . .

The sound had now reached the top. Grinding and rattling, it came toward the door. Half unconscious with fear Mrs. Genovefa sank back into the cushions. And in her mad desperation an image of the demon rose up in her mind. A long-haired, black shaggy fur, horse feet, a long, red tongue, horns, and dragging behind it a thick chain. A memory from childhood, which suddenly emerged from the past. Thus the image of the demon stood on the glass box of her parents. Shyly she looked up to this gift of an old uncle. She would never have dared to take it in her hand.

Suddenly everything was vividly before her eyes. With all the details and all the strange childish feelings she had had back then, the Krampus! And the old woman felt once again all the horrors and agonies of the child's soul when she was sent into the dark room in the evening, where the

Krampus stood on top of the glass box.

That was the last sharp impression.

Then she heard only through a confused muddle how the noises came closer . . . then they were at the door . . .

In the cage a fearful fluttering . . . The bird was frightened and fell off its perch.

Now . . . a scratching at the door . . . a groping for the handle . . .

Mrs. Genovefa was completely frozen ... It was as if she had been carried in an icy stream and propelled forward. She lay in a spasm that did not take away her senses, but made her lifeless and dull. The latch was pushed down . . . A moment of the most horrible silence . . . Then the latch snapped back with a soft screech. The footsteps moved away . . . slowly . . . across the corridor .stepped downward . . . and faded.... down . . . Mrs. Genovefa lost her senses. -

When she told the gilder about this night's experience and also told him her suspicion that the visitor had been a demon, Bauer became a little paler and shook his head.

Mrs. Genovefa anxiously searched his flickering eyes.

"I had locked the door. Would that have stopped him?"

Bauer smiled compassionately, "No, madam, locked doors do not stop malevolent spirits."

"Malevolent spirits? So you really believe . . ."

"I would almost certainly say that it was a malevolent demon of the basest kind. One of those spirits whose workings give rise to the usual haunting stories, that he was able to prevail over the influence of the good spirit of your late husband, indicates that this one lacks something. We must ask him as soon as possible what he wants. Spirits often have quite strange wishes."

"Do you want to ask him right away today?"

"If you want to, right away tonight, so that the visitation is not repeated."

The excitement of the previous night still lingered on Mrs. Genovefa. - She saw as if through a veil and heard only as if through a thick wooden wall. She had the feeling that she was in a diving bell that sealed her airtight against her environment. When she looked in the mirror, she was startled. The face of a mummy looked out at her. A leathery yellow skin stretched over protruding cheekbones. Small, glittering eyes stared out of dark

sockets. An unbearable excitement drove her from one room to the other, despite her fatigue.

She could not eat a bite, finally took a book from her husband's small library and went out into the garden. In the small arbor she made herself comfortable, pulled up the sleeping chair in which her husband had always sat, and opened the book.

It was the deceased's favorite book. Jacobsen's "Marie Grubbe". The cool leaves slipped through her hand, and she found a calming sensation in stroking the smooth pages of the book with her old, scrawny fingers.

The garden burned in the wild colors of autumn. Red grapevine foliage covered the gray stakes of the arbor. Already the first night frosts had thinned the purple curtains. On the rough wooden table in the center of the arbor lay three of the large, jagged leaves, as if arranged by a loving hand into a symmetrical figure. Mrs. Genovefa caressed the bold, bizarre lines with her gaze, and rejoiced in the colorful confusion of the leaves. Some of the glowing crimson still sat on the stems, but from the jagged edges the inks of decay were already reaching for it: brown-red, rust-red, yellow-brown and yellow - a bright, victorious banner of death.

And the woman's gaze became sharper and sharper. She saw the borders and finest gradations of the colors and discovered the beauties of the delicate rib branchings. The irregular squares of the last, finest ramifications appeared to her like a revelation of highest happiness.

A deep tranquility flowed into her from the beauty of these leaves. Her gaze slipped away and sought the image of the garden. Through a gap in the wall of foliage she marveled at its autumnal splendor. She purposely did not look through the wide entrance of the arbor. She wanted to look at the garden in detail.

Obscured by the irregular lines of overlapping leaves, she surveyed a small part of the garden. There was the corner where some mighty chestnut trees stood. She saw only a piece of the strong trunks. Cracked, rough barks that drew colored gradations from yellow to black-green. Dark patches ran in reckless lines through those colors. Autumn fog and rain had left their moisture there in the porous bark. Between the trunks were dense layers of brown leaves.

Droughty shrubs stretched their tender, sharp little branches into the cutout. A whole bed of asters. On the protruding branch of a pear tree was an abandoned nest box. Between the withering foliage of a plum tree the

juicy heavy blue streaked fruits.

It was all so sad.

Sad and yet hopeful. For all these gloomy colors of transition, of the end, would give way again to a merry spring field of green. That was certain.

Mrs. Genovefa was surprised: how did she know that with such certainty? Well, because it happened every year.

It was sad and comforting and above all - so simple. So completely without secrets and peculiarities. Death and death, and from it new life.

Not so confused and unexplained and so less beautiful as the life of the spirits. Here was something sublime and uplifting. And in the intercourse with the spirits, she had gotten to know only depressing and unattractive things. How petty was the behavior of this world of spirits with its classes of rank and its ladder from the mischievous to the highest spirits.

A continuation of this world into an afterlife. An endless prolongation of all the miseries of this world. Never an end of these little torments. If there was not an absolute in the hereafter, something completely without relation and earthly comparison, then. the end of the chain could really not be foreseen. Then the highest spirit of this series was again and again only imperfect and low compared to the spirits of a higher order. Was this eternity, the freedom from all earthly stuff?

Mrs. Genovefa paused. She was astonished and almost frightened by the certainty and calmness with which she had developed these thoughts. She had not thought so coherently and clearly for months. It was as if all volatility, all confusion had been taken from her.

The coolness of the autumn day had come over her soul. She stood up and looked out into the garden with her eyes wide open. Her hand was resting on the open book, and she felt as if a warm stream were rising from it into her arm . . . a warm, fragrant, caressing stream.

As if she felt a familiar closeness, a mysterious togetherness with a dear person. Here in this arbor which had been her husband’s favorite place with his favorite book in hand ... in the great and clear coolness of the autumn day? Had the place and the book still preserved a part of her husband's personality, which now that she remembered him - strongly overflowed onto her?

As she remembered him? She did not think of him in firm, clear outlines, it was only a silent, unimaginative innerness, like the blurring of

colors in the evening mist of the meadows. She only felt that at that moment she was completely pure and completely good. And this moment united her in spirit with her dead beloved.

How sanctified she felt by his nearness. She felt at the same time that this intercourse of the spirits was more intimate and deeper than all appearances mediated by incantation, that this was the only way in which spirits revealed themselves. And there rose in her a cruel suspicion, a doubt that suddenly seized her with clawed hands: then all the sittings, all the manifestations, spirit shrines and knocking sounds were probably just a hoax. And she had become the victim of a fraud. What had she learned so far from the spirit? Had he brought her an inkling of the beauty and grandeur of his world? The one, single moment she had just felt, with its profound experiences, outweighed all the revelations from the spirit world. Only now had the spirit of her husband come. Now he had sought and found her in truth. Not in the ghostly light or in the darkness of the night, but by rising from the most secret depths of the soul and filling her interior.

This certainty, which now suddenly stood firm in her, caused her a slight pain, which, however, immediately gave way to the wonderful sensation of a soft brightness. Her soul had become free, and only now did she know what burden had been weighing her down all this time.

So Dominik Bauer was deceiving her. But why was that? Her occasional gifts were really only a small reward for his efforts.

So he had to have another plan!

She recalled once again the story of her relationship with the gilder.

Her husband's picture had fallen off the wall! And Bauer had interpreted this as a sign that the deceased wanted something.

But the spirit had not yet said what it actually wanted. Empty back and forth was all - if she thought about it right. Mrs. Genovefa walked up and down the damp garden paths, listening with infinite pleasure to the sharp crunching of the sand under her feet. She was happy that the sounds became loud to her again, that she saw the colors unveiled.

A distrust that did not reach her own consciousness led her to the back corner of the house, where the windows of the bedroom were. She entered the bushes, not paying attention to the fact that she sank in the damp garden soil up to her ankles. And there, when she had penetrated to under the windows of the bedroom - there she saw innumerable footprints from the wall of the house over to the fence of the neighbor's garden. A whole path . .

. most of the footsteps were already old and not recent, their edges caved in. But there were a few new ones, sharp and deep impressions. They hadn't been made before last night. That was the way of the spirits into the house.

Mrs. Genovefa straightened up. She was pale, but she smiled. But how had the ghost entered the house? She began to examine the windows. A soft, almost blissful laugh relieved her of her tension. So that was it! The windows of the old house had been closed by bars, which intervened at the top and bottom of the window beams. Now someone had carefully removed the wood of the beams, so far that the bolts found no resistance and the locked window was actually unlocked. If one now pushed back the bolts with some tool, there was no longer any obstacle to getting in.

Mrs. Genovefa laughed again quite heartily. So she had allowed herself to be deceived by such clumsy means. The ghost had climbed in, groaned and moaned, rolled around in the bed, taken the picture off the wall and crawled to her door as Krampus.

As Krampus! She had tormented herself with such childish images of terror. The whole apparitions and manifestations suddenly seemed to her like monstrous silliness. Like the ghosts of a second childhood, of old age.

Smiling, she awaited the gilder. Dominik Bauer had not expected to find her so calm and safe. He had done everything to agitate her and to shatter her clear judgment. Now Mrs. Genovefa came to meet him smiling and graciously led him into the bedroom with almost ironic politeness. His gaze slid inquiringly over her face. She turned away, for she knew the spellbinding power of those eyes.

We will ask Bimbus an important question today."

The gilder spoke this low, mysteriously, almost in a whisper. He stood in the middle of the room. A lost glow of light passed over his face. All around him weaved the gray twilight of the autumn evening. Mrs. Genovefa felt again as if a net was wrapped around her body.

"If he does not want to answer us today, I will force him to. A wicked thing, a very dangerous attempt."

The woman shook off with effort the feeling that wanted to overwhelm her. She forced herself to pay sharp attention and listen carefully, so that she would not miss anything that might confirm her suspicions. And there it became clear to her for the first time that this man spoke quite differently from the way his image and status should have. For the first time, she sensed the learnedness and way he phrased in his words.

In the meantime, Bauer had straightened the table. He had prepared paper and pencil and now lowered the curtains. Darkness rushed out from the corners and made the room disappear into the emptiness.

Bauer grasped the old woman's hands; "Now. Madam, think quite firmly of your deceased husband."

And then in an incantatory tone:

"Bimbus. Are you there?"

The table knocked, "Yes!"

"Bimbus, will you write to us today?"

"Yes!"

"Bimbus, will you tell us today what you want from us?"

No answer.

"Bimbus. You must write today what you want from us."

Hesitantly. . Unwillingly ... A short tap, "Yes!"

"So write!"

A confused scratching on the paper.

"Bimbus. You don't write! This is pointless stuff."

The scratching continued.

"Ah, that's not Bimbus," Bauer whispered, "that's the other one, the mischievous teasing spirit." And then stronger and commanding, "Bimbus, Bimbus, come back! Bimbus, are you there?"

Slowly and timidly. . "Yes!"

"So write."

Now the pencil passed over the paper in long, regular strokes.

"He's writing," Bauer whispered.

Mrs. Genovefa shivered. This man was an accomplished artist in his way. How faithfully he held his part. How he knew how to produce one shiver of ghostly fear after another.

The scratching stopped.

Bauer got up and went to the bedside table where the lamp stood. With a faint bang, a match flared up. Stray rays dithered in the dark room. Then the broad, calm light of the lamp flooded over the man, glaringly illuminating his pockmarked face. He took the small mirror from the wall, in which he used to decipher the writing of the spirit.

A ray of light slipped from the blank surface of the glass, flashed dazzlingly over the face of the woman, who was still sitting in front of the table, and then leaped in mad dashes over the walls and ceiling of the room.

Bauer held out the mirror in front of Mrs. Genovefa and placed the written sheet opposite her. She read over the man's shoulder:

"Please money, two thousand guilders, buried in the garden next to the arbor. Bimbus needs two thousand guilders."

So that was it. Bimbus needed money. Mrs. Genovefa was stunned by the impudence of this demand. But at the same time she knew that only yesterday she would have given any sum without thinking. Yesterday she would not have dared to ask why ghosts needed money.

But now she asked - quietly and shyly:

"What does Bimbus need money for?"

Bauer's pale face turned dark red. He felt that this question sprang from a new distrust.

"What do I know?" he groaned brutally. "Ghosts often have strange desires. We were free not to ask about them. But now that we have asked, we must also fulfill them."

Mrs. Genovefa pushed back the table and stood up. Bauer felt he had gone too far:

"Are you feeling all right, madam?"

"I don't feel quite well. I'm too excited for today. Tomorrow we'll talk about the matter further."

The gilder stood there quite affected. Today he had done his job very badly. How could his impatience have led him to this stupid prank? Now the whole story, so wonderfully initiated, was again endlessly prolonged. He was angry and embarrassed at the same time, stammered some wishes for a speedy recovery, and left.

When the garden gate fell into the lock behind Bauer and Mrs. Genovefa turned the key, she had a wonderful feeling of relief. Never again should the man cross this threshold. And tomorrow she wanted to immediately repair the windows of the bedroom and have all the windows on the ground level fitted with strong bars.

She also wanted to finally take Fanny in. The old woman was stupid and unreliable - she had been opening and closing the windows in the bedroom all these months and had not noticed the gilder's device - but she was still a living being. The canary alone was no longer enough for the old woman.

She was so terribly tired today. She felt it only when she undressed and went to bed. Her soul had been through the most terrible experiences, but

more than all these horrors, the joyful union with the deceased had tired her today. It was as if the memory of him had drawn its strength from the remnants of the old woman's vitality. Genovefa took out an old picture of the dead man, and it coincided with feature after feature that had arisen in her mind. The old woman's hands trembled as she pulled out the headrest and she barely had the strength to pull the blanket up to her chest. Wishlessly and peacefully she fell asleep. -

It was a short sleep...

She awoke to an unusual brightness that gently lifted her eyelids as if a soft hand were stroking them. The room was filled with a silver glow that pushed its walls far out and made them seem like transilluminated distances.

The dark furniture stood like monstrous mountains or boulders against an infinite distant view.

Mrs. Genovefa was surprised; this solitary chamber had never seemed so beautiful and joyful to her. The feeling of relief and release from an agonizing pressure returned, and Mrs. Genovefa felt in blissful excitement the closeness of a friendly spirit.

She was so weak that she could not move a limb, she knew quite clearly that she was unable to move a finger, and yet she had the feeling of a gentle gliding.

The distances into which her mind looked seemed to her more and more luminous and transparent. She looked into paradisiacal laughing landscapes and again the impressions of her childhood rose from the dark slumbering depths of her soul. Rocks of gray and red speckled paper, one more rugged than the other, on the ledges grass of green wool. A pond of mirror glass, on which crouched the motionless wooden swans. Bold footbridges with dainty railings lead over the steep slopes. In the rushes of the brook made of tin foil stands a small mill with a large water wheel. A mine lets you look into its interior and shows the miners working diligently. A shepherd sits on a rock and blows the flute with his arm stiffly spread out. Around him, in the grass, his motionless flock of lambs. There the forest with the trees, which are not much higher than the man, who cuts wood between the trunks.

And in the background, on the back of the mountain above, the city. A fantastic dream of the Orient: a tangle of houses and towers, surrounded by high walls.

This is a picture from childhood, a Christmas nativity crib, as it stood in the large room of her grandfather. The laborious work of long weeks, the bliss of the little girl.

Sometimes black, threatening colossi glide over these pictures. Mrs. Genovefa knows that this is the furniture of her room. She rests on a silver gondola in the middle of a pond of mirror glass, and her room, the whole world revolves around her. She just has to be careful of the furniture. For if she were to bump into them in the rapid rotation, the gondola and she with it would shatter, for it is made of the most delicate rose-red glass.

The distances glide past her, and she always sees something new. It is as if the animals and people gain life and move. Now a whole meadow full of comfortably grazing cattle. And then comes a whole procession of strange people. Slim, brown fellows leading camels by the halters; in a magnificent palanquin a black man with a turban decorated with precious stones sparkling on his head. Three elephants carry enormous loads of gold. Long rows of slaves gasp under bales of precious spices.

And then - in a dilapidated stable Mary with the child. The father a little apart from it, very thoughtful. Sunk in contemplation, and all around a crowd of shepherds. In the darkness of the stable an ox and a little ox.

Mrs. Genovefa sees all this perfectly. Completely perfectly. She even sees that the edges of the modeling cardboard on the front wall of the hut are gaping apart. Her grandfather has not worked so carefully there.

And a star twinkles above the stable.

Her eyes hasten to see its brilliance. It becomes brighter and brighter before her eyes. Stable and rock and Jerusalem sink in the brilliance of this star.

She sees nothing now. It is as if her being dissolved into a tremendous brightness. She only hears how a dear, familiar voice speaks very close to her ear:

"You, my dear . . . Dear . . . Dear . . ."

In the sound of this voice lies everything: youth, bridal time and blissful marital happiness. She feels that her beloved is now completely with her.

A hand grasps hers . . . and the gliding . . . and circling becomes a . . . hovering . . .

A dark figure climbs over the fence of the neighbor's garden. Carefully, so that the bushes do not rustle, up to the windows of the bedroom. Two

quick grips on the window frame and silently the wings open. Dominik Bauer climbs in and lights his flat pocket lantern. He stands undecided for a moment. This extreme measure - does he really have to use it? The old woman can die of fright. And he has nothing against the old woman. But he must have the money. He must have it; he can no longer take the old woman's nerves into consideration.

Bauer unwraps some make-up sticks from the package he has with him. A few quick glances at the picture of the deceased, then with a few fleeting strokes he establishes an approximate resemblance.

Now he wraps himself in the large white cloth that reaches to his feet and forms a long train at the back, and fastens the light bulb powered by the pocket battery under his chin.

He takes another look in the mirror - excellent. Then he quickly takes off his boots and puts the spare key in readiness, which he has long since prepared for this extreme.

And now with silent soles over the stairs. . . Step by step.

The gilder is now getting a little anxious. What if Mrs. Genovefa were struck by a blow?! But he must have the money. He can't wait any longer. And he has seen only too clearly that the woman's trust is shaken. She will never believe him so completely again.

It must be!

The man grits his teeth and continues to climb. He trembles and his gaze becomes confused. At the same time, he strives to make eerie noises by growling, dragging and prowling along the wall.

Now he stands in front of the bedroom door and carefully inserts the key into the lock...

A face that bears a terrible resemblance to the image of the deceased is before his eyes.

The rigid face opposite contorts into a fearful grimace, and a rumbling laugh escapes from the wide maw.

The gilder stands frozen for a moment. Then, however, he begins to scream, his eyes fixed wide open on his counterpart:

"Ah . . . ahahahah . . ."

Like a martyred animal, like a tortured of hell, wild, gruesome and incessant.

But the other one only laughs...

Then the man turns with a convulsive jerk and falls down the stairs

with wobbly knees. He falls down, picks himself up and runs on again. In the process, he shouts incessantly.

But he hears a cat-like, elastic jump and kick close behind him. And he feels . . . a hand reaching for his neck.

Through the bedroom and the window . . . out into the garden.

"Ah . . . ahahahah . . . ah . . . ahah!"

The mad, flickering glow of the incandescent light breaks through the bushes . . . Then suddenly the light goes out and the shouting dies in a rattle.

-

Old Fanny was more than a little surprised in the morning when she found the woman's bedroom door open. And she was so frightened that the water jug fell out of her hand when she saw Mrs. Genovefa pale and motionless in bed.

On the face of the woman was still the reflection of a wondrous joy.

But Fanny did not grasp the majesty of this transfiguration; she felt only with horror: dead - dead - dead.

Screaming and howling, she ran away. Late in the evening a judicial commission appeared. Some traces indicated that the woman's death had not been entirely natural. A pair of worn men's shoes, a box with make-up sticks and a pocket lantern were found in the bedroom.

The window overlooking the garden was open.

After a long search, the body of the gilder was found in a corner of the garden, among thick bushes. He was stuck between the broken slats of the garden fence; a tattered white cloth enveloped his body and had wrapped itself around individual broken sticks of the fence. Completely twisted together, as if screwed into each other by a terrible force, the body was wedged there between the bars of the fence. His neck showed blue-reddish welts. The man's made-up face stared in the mask of horror.

"Strangulation marks," said the young coroner with importantly matter-of-factness, pointing to the strange stripes.

The Easter Lamb.

So now it is decided.

The doctor left, shaking his head and squeezing my hand. He did not say anything, but he was moved. I saw it. I know the look of the doctors when they know there is no more that can be done. I have met many, many doctors during this time. If one of them was in doubt, did not know what to do, I immediately saw it on his face. Then I thanked him for his services and he left. But the good, reliable doctors - how many were there? - All got that look in the end, in which a little real sadness is mixed with professionalism. And finally the most famous among them: the last hope. He just left.

So now it is decided.

My wife will remain lame until her death. I was assured that she could live for a very long time. How old is she now? Twenty-five years! Fifty years more and she will be seventy-five. She is otherwise healthy. She can still live quite well for half a century. But she will never be able to move herself. She will only ever get out of bed and into a recliner, out of the recliner and into bed, and on nice days, out into the street in a wheelchair.

No more movements. I will never again admire the rhythm of her slender limbs. Always in a recliner. Year in, year out! Her tired shoulders will sink forward, her chest will slump, her back will arch under the pressure of the years, and her eyes will grow larger and larger and become full of a strange glow.

Half a century! Then you will be an old mother with white hair and still sitting in an armchair. You haven't moved for half a century. The passionate longing for the fulfillment of love, which at the beginning had created the child who tormented you has died, and you look wistfully at her remains: distant images and half-blurred memories.

Your child, however, has become a young man, has matured, has taken a wife and now has children of his own. He lives in a foreign city and writes letters to his parents from time to time, joyful letters full of strength and happiness. He lives and moves and does not think that his birth has taken away half of your life.

You love him after all, who is the cause of your sufferings. Your eyes are moist with emotion when you look at him. I cannot bear it.

I hate him.

For he has taken you from me. He has taken your body from me completely and I must share your love with him. He tore you apart, disfigured you, and destroyed you to come into the world; this superfluous one that no one had called. He crippled you at his birth and paralyzed you forever. And he lives. He cries out and desires food and wriggles his hands and feet.

And you sit paralyzed in the recliner, and your eyes are soft and shining with emotion at his crying and wriggling.

I hate him.

When I entered, she looked at me for a long time.

"What did the doctor say?"

"He didn't say anything!"

"Is he going to come back?"

"I ... I don't know. Of course: he will come!"

Then she beckoned me to her and put her hand in mine. Narrow and pale and cuddly she lay there, and a terrible fear seized me. She guessed everything. I dared not look her in the eyes.

"Why do you want to hide this from me? He's not coming anymore. Tomorrow I would know anyway. It's all in vain. It will now stay this way. I have found my three and I am satisfied. Don't be unhappy and try to bear it. If only our child is healthy."

Then I let go of her hand and stepped away from her. Why did she now call me an enemy?

Over there, behind the trees of the old park glowed a strong red evening light. The walls and pictures in the room received a joyful glow from it. Down in the garden, two large hunting dogs were fighting. In awkward movements they broke through the bushes, knocked each other over, played with each other's ears, chased each other through the whole garden, until they finally stopped, exhausted and panting, with their tongues hanging out.

From the adjoining room came the humming and trapping of the nanny. In between, the squealing of the child.

Out there stood the great, flaming life. Victorious, glorious, resplendent; the life that my wife had destroyed in order to bring an unwanted, superfluous creature into the world.

*

The wonderful spring day has lured me out. A light, green lace veil

shows on the trees and the damp earth steams in the hot sunlight.

The road workers scrape up the droppings in little houses with long-handled scrapers. They work a little, and then stand again, tamping the tobacco tighter in their short pipes, and their conversation passes from their lips in heavy, languid words.

The schoolboys are pushing their way out of the schoolhouse gate, shoving each other into the street dirt, hitting each other in the ears with their leather bags and shouting at the top of their lungs.

The sparrows on top of the eaves are also screaming and ruffling their feathers. At the corner, the old service man is sticking up notices.

A gang of boys stands behind him jeering, "They are all crooked."

Furious, the old man turns around and sprays his glue brush at the gang. Laughing, they disperse and now stand at a greater distance: "They are all crooked."

Cruel children, as cruel as spring. Only we adults are full of consideration, full of pity, full of mercy with everyone - except with ourselves.

I have been able to forget a little and I am big and strong and full of fresh desire. My wife looks at me and stretches out her hand. I kiss her hand and kneel down beside the armchair;

"How stuffy it is here!"

"The child was with me."

"You couldn't open the windows then?"

"The air is still too sharp and rough."

My freshness invades the poor woman and overwhelms her. Wearily her head sinks against my shoulder, and her pale lips strive towards my kiss. - I kiss her.

Suddenly I see her in front of me, as a schoolgirl with short dresses and a thick hanging braid. Always some colorful ribbon at the bottom. How often have I stolen these ribbons, kept them in my breast pocket and kissed them secretly. And then those delicious moments on the narrow, dark spiral staircase leading to the choir of the parish church. When we were supposed to push past each other and couldn't because we held hands and wouldn't let go. Those evening walks when we saw from the hills the city in front of us, with the glittering rows of windows and the blazing red domes of the church towers. Then the time when we felt our bodies awakening to each other; when the pressure of our hands betrayed a hot desire and one of us

was ignited by the flame of the other. And when we conquered the vast summer land. After a tiring march on the top of a mountain. Stone debris all around, raspberry bushes and a green wilderness of creepers. Behind us, the forest rustled, and it was like the quiet accompaniment to a blissful, sun-drenched, lonely melody. And in front of us the rich land: green forest waves first, then ripe yellow fields and then red tiled roofs, a village. Field and forest and red villages to the horizon. My soul spoke softly and full of devotion to you: this is yours. And you took this most delicious gift from my hands, and a deep gratitude shook you. But I took you around the body and jumped with you over the stone debris downhill, so that you lost your hat, and your heavy, shiny tresses came undone . . .

I start up. Your eyes are full of tears. You know what I was thinking of. We were so one that we still think together. I can't immerse myself in the past without hurting you at the same time. I need to learn to forget it.

* *
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The nanny is a robust, healthy farmer's wife who walks around my room all day in her heavy shoes, banging the doors and breaking something every moment. Every two hours she brings the child to my wife. And the paralyzed woman takes the child to her breast and lets it drink. Nature has done a miracle here. She has provided for the life of the new creature. She has not denied the mother the fulfillment of her motherly duties.

But I cannot watch it when she suckles her child. The cooing, snapping sounds, the pulling and tugging outrage me. And when the silent gaze of my wife pursues me, I prefer to leave.

I love to step out at dusk onto an open garden. From there I can see down into the garden and the courtyard and over many roofs and courtyards with church towers towering above.

The wind blows through my hair and gently in my ear. A strange chant:

"Fingers up, fingers up, ju --ju . . . ju . . . finger . . . finger . . . Finger point."

These words come to me from the towers. And I suddenly remember: As a little boy on the secondary school bench . . . The religion teacher stands before us, his wrinkled, parchment-colored face somber and fanatical. He explains to us:

"The church tower points upward. It is a finger pointing upwards. It speaks: arise, Oh human spirit, from the lowliness of your stasis.

And the wind brings me, between the whirring and humming, the lost words.

*

The dark park trees outside our windows are covered with the green shimmer of spring. The wavering shoots flutter like delicate flags. Everything is full of sweet distress.

The hunting dogs in the garden are like mad. Spring has come for them, too, and the mighty urge of love.

A verse wants to form in me:

Now that youth has come upon us and its golden radiant power shines through us....

But I can go no further. My gaze falls on the armchair and on the pale, frightened woman, and I can't go any further.

I feel very clearly how my heart turns over in my chest. My hand reaches for the drooping fingers of my wife. They are cold and wet and wince under my touch. Her gaze comes from deep within her and passes me by, into a misty distance. This is fear ... yes, helpless, most horrible fear ... She looks past me. Does she see something I don't? I stroke her hair and kiss her cheeks. She nestles against me, but I feel that at the same time she is trembling before me.

I dare not ask what she fears in me.

*

We read together once again after a long time. For the first time since that unfortunate day. You remember how happy it made me to be able to read something to you.

You wanted it to be like it was then.

Oh, I wish we hadn't tried. The shadows of the past covered us and made our sadness even greater.

I took a volume from the bookcase: Günther's Poems. A world-fire of voluptuous passion lives in these rhythms. The passion of a long lost time that was red hot and full of reckless power. I was reading one of those wedding poems from which the raptures of love rise before us with glowing life. I felt my wife's eyes fixed on me. But I read on with a blind grayness. I knew that with these verses I was tearing her heart apart, that I was evoking a past that had sunk forever. The embers of passion overflowed into her, filled her soul and racked her poor, paralyzed body. These tender words, the hot concepts that surrounded her, were like lashes. I, however, was frantic

and did not let go until she put her hand on my arm and said in a weak voice:

"No . . . no . . . no! Please, don't do that. Take Goethe instead."

Then I read some of Goethe's songs. The sultry glow sank, but a new agony rose. The agony of the hottest joy. Of free pleasure, even more tormenting and destructive than the fire of sensuality.

I put the book away. Then I saw that bitter, hot tears were flowing from my wife's eyes; and I rushed before her, clasped her knees and begged her desperately and sobbed for her forgiveness. But she bowed down and kissed me on the forehead with the gentleness of a saint full of goodness and meekness.

Today I wrote some words on a white sheet of paper. I sat and pondered, and then I had a strange sensation that something was stirring in my depths, independently of me. I felt: a cave, no, a long, dark tube that led far into the darkness . . . and in this tube something slippery, smooth, sticky, slimy and disgusting, like a monstrous worm. In a thousand ringlets the formless body moves. And it strives forward, always forward ... jerkily. . .

Then something forced me to throw meaningless words onto a blank piece of paper:

"We are subject to the Moloch of time. It is voracious and does not spare the children. Dances of joy and torchlight around a brazen shrine of the gods and the smell of roasted human flesh ... hot ... hot.... hot, In the sacrifice the gods descend . . . they are merciful to the victim. And new life blossoms from the ruins. From Moloch ... Moloch ... bloody torches blaze and smoke, from the smell of murder arise psalms ... Blessing psalms. . Of new life."

I put this paper in my wife's hand when I came home. I don't know why. It was the same compulsion that made me write those meaningless words.

I don't understand them anymore. But I know I will understand them again some time.

* *

The two hunting dogs are dead.

The landlord is furious and has given notice to the party at the back of the courtyard. He suspects them of having poisoned the animals. The landlord's family walks around with tear-stained eyes. Miss Rosa told me the whole story.

Such good, smart dogs. Especially Nero; tremendously affectionate. But Diana, too. Only, of course, like all females, less reliable. Even when she had puppies, she was very biting, almost vicious. But - and Miss Rosa got wet eyes and a red nose again - the animals would never have done anything to anyone. The garden in which they ran around was the master's garden. If the father knew for sure who had done this ... he would report him; surely, surely the animals had been poisoned. I doubted and stood amazed. At the same time, I put the expression of amazement on my face; I did it with consciousness and deliberation, marveling that I could do it so well.

Slowly, shaking my head, I climbed the stairs. From the landing of the second floor I looked down once more at Miss Rosa, who was still standing in the same place with a sad attitude. And I had to laugh when I saw that she was always staring unblinkingly at the garden.

When my wife received me with an anxious look, I felt a hot desire to tell her: Tonight the master's dogs were poisoned. With heavy, insistent words I wanted to tell her that. With such words, which cannot be forgotten again. I feel the power within me to speak such words. Words that cut flesh and bone like sharp saws. But I conquered my lust. A prickling sensation on my tongue and a violent sneezing in my nose tormented me, but I stuck to myself and did not betray myself.

Oh, I'm smart. I know that if I had betrayed myself, it would have been a warning to them.

A warning - of what? I don't know.

I step to the window. The garden lies lonely. Spring is alone among the budding bushes and the softly swaying trees. The dogs no longer play in it. I liked the animals, I like all animals. They are so helpless, so touching, when they stand at the step that leads to the spiritual life and cannot cross over. Nero and Diana knew me and always greeted me joyfully and wagging their tails. Because they knew that they always got good bites from me.

Last night, too, they came to me whimpering softly and pressed themselves against me. But the bites, which I gave them, were the meal of death.

Why? I don't know anymore. But I do know that a higher state of consciousness led me to this end result: the dogs must be put out of the away. Like a physical compulsion, this conclusion affected me. I was not allowed to resist. Because I still know" that every attempt at resistance

would have resulted in nausea and nausea.

I also remember some links of the higher chain of thought now. What stands in the way of my happiness must die: that was one link. The other: what killed my happiness must die. And then: what torments and plagues me, I am entitled to remove out of the way. And then again in a wild rhythm: the jumping, jumping pair of dogs . . . live, live, live, hup!

And from all this rises quite clearly the conviction: they had to be poisoned, because I could not bear this excess of energy and spring exuberance. Not here, not in front of these windows, behind which my paralyzed wife sat. I would have killed the spring in the garden down there, too, if I had been able to catch it.

I felt so light now, when I saw the evening twilight sink between the dead bushes.

And I tried to hide my inward rejoicing when I said:

"Tonight the two dogs of the master of the house have been poisoned."

But when I looked around, I saw by the horror in my wife's eyes that she had understood more than I had wanted to tell her.

* *
*

In eight days it will be the feast of Easter.

I am as solemn to courage as if I were a priest who has to perform a sacred act.

I prepare myself for the feast by purifying myself. I spread my interior before me and examine it to its last corners. I am cruel to myself and spare myself in none of my weaknesses. There I recognize: I am vain, unreliable, insidious, insincere and above all immoderately selfish.

But that is all very well. For he who is not so, perishes. He who does not glorify himself, who does not care for his self fights, and goes down. But I also check myself whether I have the right to want to be a self. And my judging mind awards me this right. In addition a voice comes from the clouds: you are one of my sons, whom I scatter to all times, so that these shout about them, and I am pleased with them.

I also read the Bible again and rejoice in the power that wrote down these heartfelt words.

I read of the afflictions of the people of Israel in Egypt. And that God required them to sacrifice their firstborn. From the out flowing power of the sacrifices the Godhead sucks new life. The thousands of dead in the

universe generate thousands of new births. The Godhead is a being that must be nourished in order to live.

Now is the holy time, the Easter time - Easter. Then the Son of Man died on the cross. And solemnly goes the ancient chorus of sacrifice:

"Now the lamb is slain,
The sacrifice is complete."

* *
*

The cook has complained to my wife that the large kitchen knife has been lost. I carry this knife around with me, under my clothes, on my bare body. In the evening I take it to bed with me. When I wake up in the night and feel the bright, cold blade against my body, a pleasant shiver runs over me.

* *
*

The cook is beside herself with amazement. The kitchen knife has suddenly found itself again. It was in its old place in the dish basket. It suddenly occurred to me - I don't know what made me think of it - that the sacrifice must be made only with an unused knife.

I bought a new knife with a wide, sparkling blade. But it was still not sharp enough for me. At the corner of Jakob Street there is a poor old scissors grinder. I wanted to give the old man something to earn. Sparks flew from the spinning grindstone, and I was "pleased" with this lovely, happy firework.

Good Friday.

Jubilant sunshine and hymns of spring over the smoky factory town. All the gardens between the gray walls bloom towards the light.

And the blowing of a soft wind. . Full and heavy with dust . . . over the rooftops.

I opened the window and moved my wife's reclining chair near it. Her pale, narrow face becomes more animated in the breath of fresh air. Her eyes shine, as if longing for distant destinations.

There is a strange droning in my ears. A rhythm produced by blows on an iron door. To this is added a whining text:

"Now is the lamb slain.
The sacrifice is complete."

As if from a thousand untrained children's voices.

At my chest I feel the coolness of the steel. In some movements its sharpness scores my skin. I secretly look at my shirt. Red spots begin to cover it. A red so bright, so funny, like the power of spring outside.

Cheerful and impetuous, the red drops push from a hidden spring to the white surface.

I sent the cook to church. Now I ask the nanny if she also wants to go away.

Of course she would like to, but the child . . .

She could leave it here with us for the time being, we would take care of it for a while.

Finally we are alone - the two of us and ... the child. The little one sleeps in his stroller.

I feel quite holy. I go through my whole life once again and let all impurity sink from me. For only from pure hands can the sacrifice be pleasing.

Only then will the fierce God restore health to my wife.

I am completely priest, and the divine touches me with anticipatory shivers. I take the child out of the stroller and unwrap it on the table. It sleeps quietly.

My wife has looked out of the window with a happy smile and speaks into the spring:

"When our child grows up . . ."

Then she turns and sees me with the knife bent over the child.

A scream ... a single cry.

But I speak words, meaningless words . . . I only know: it is the Mexican blood ritual . . . *teketepotl huatli may* . . . and draw the knife slowly and with firm pressure through the child's throat. Blood, blood . . . red hot over my fingers ... a gurgling and a gasping ... a twitching of arms and legs.

Then silence. The white upholstery is soaked with blood. A narrow stream runs over the tabletop and suddenly drips with a soft sound over its edge onto the floor.

My wife sits in her armchair . . . motionless . . . her eyes are fixed on me. I feel that she is hurling a monstrous curse at my head.

But I will bear it gladly. I did it, after all, to save her. Inside me it is bright and cheerful. I sink to my knees, and a voice, rough and strange to me, joins in the great Easter chorus:

“Now the lamb is slain.
The sacrifice is complete."

The Automaton from Horneck.

"You see," said my friend, "one does our time a little injustice if one laughs at its weariness and overstimulation.

On the other hand, they find so much that is vigorous and forward-looking that decadence becomes necessary purely as a counter value. One should not ridicule their extravagance, but try to understand it. They are the fantastic dreams that replace the glaring reality of our public and economic life. Decadence is a periodically recurring phenomenon. Take the romanticism of the end of the eighteenth century. It is nothing else.

Today one only senses through the veils of an entire century the tremendous excitement of the souls of that time, which had taken over as a counter-vibration against the rigidness of the Enlightenment. It was the time of the robber novels and the knight plays. Almost during the lifetime of the luminous Joseph the Second, people sought out the darkest Middle Ages. One withdrew from time to the old castles of the past.

I do not mean this figuratively, but actually. There were many noblemen who had such an old nest rebuilt and fell into a precarious atavism in doing so. Here, very near, is such a castle, which at that time was allowed to celebrate a resurrection. The new life did not last long. Today Horneck is a ruin again. But for a year it seemed as if the times of the Moravian knighthood had returned.

I have gathered the entire strange story from old documents, family papers and the chronicle of the priest. And since I know that you love strange stories, I will tell it to you.

The man who was allowed to dream himself back into the past for a year at Horneck was called Johann Count von Reutershahn and was a celebrated favorite of Viennese society. He won his victories with his dashing, slender, beautiful body and his brilliant, sharp mind. They were the victories of hunting, fencing and love. He took them with the matter-of-factness that gave his nature a beautiful, aristocratic calm. Time had become all confused and mad, and it seemed as if the fear of the revolution, which crept from France like gray, hissing snakes into all countries, had become in Vienna the frenzy of the last days. All the senses were whipped up to the point of complete exhaustion and one threw oneself into the dances in a

mad addiction to pleasure.

The count was also surrounded by this hot dance. But he kept his measure in everything and did not lose himself anywhere. For this very reason he was all the more desired. One day he disappeared from Vienna, and the liveried servants of the beautiful women had to explain to their mistresses with dismay that not a trace of him could be found. Reutershahn had left this world of effervescent pleasure for another that promised him even greater voluptuousness of the soul.

After long negotiations with the last heir of the impoverished Horneck family, he had acquired the beautiful ruin in the quiet forested valley. And quite secretly, while the count was still in Vienna at the center of all the great festivities, the old castle was rebuilt. The walls rose again above the rustling crowns of trees, and the machicolations stretched their restored projections boldly into the air. When they had finished, a secret message called the count to his castle.

He arrived at night, left the carriage on the gentle driveway and climbed the short and arduous footpath to the castle. Two servants preceded him with torches. A huge key opened a small gate in the wall, a secret passage and a narrow spiral staircase led him to his bedroom. The count ate a spit-roasted leg of venison and then looked down into the courtyard, where the servants were bustling about at his command. The red lights of their torches fell distortedly into the corners and dark ravines of the courtyard, fluttering around like burning birds up the walls, along the ledges and edges, out into the darkness, to settle over there in the black treetops.

The next morning the lord of the castle walked on the battlements of the inner wall around the castle. He wore a doublet of buffalo skin, and a softly clinking dagger hung at his side in a gem-studded hilt. The gold-embroidered shirt, the breeches, the silk stockings and the gallantry sword had been recovered from somewhere in the depths of a box, which old Nepomuk had saved from the contemptuous and angry looks of the master. Down in the courtyard a pack of wild Transylvanian bear dogs, which the count had specially ordered, was yapping. And no one had seen a single bear around the castle for fifty years. So the count walked around his castle and soon looked at its strangely nested parts, its towers and the bold and abrupt aerial pathways that connected them, and then again over the treetops away into the valley, where the huts of the peasants pressed reverently into the folds of the forest. Only one thing disturbed the count in

this image, which he forced into his interior with a new passion. His castle looked too new, too little inhabited and venerable. One noticed the improvements at all the corners and walls. From the roof the new tiles shone in their bright red of yesterday, the walls showed their fresh plaster, and the windows were so very ungenuine and wholesome.

This had to change. With the grim face of a lord over life and death, the count summoned the castellan and presented him with his concerns. He apologized profusely and promised to remedy the situation. And the very next day, while the count was rummaging through the castle library, throwing out all the books of the newer kind, leaving only all the codices of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the craftsmen reappeared at the castle.

They hurried to remove all traces of novelty, and they lit great fires of straw, whose smoke darkened the walls and blackened the fresh plaster, whose heat scorched the window frames and made the glass panes crack. They "artificially created" the colors and the dirt of age with ashes and pitch. In the meantime, others scattered earth over the joints, channels and cracks in the roof and sowed grass seeds over them. And after only a few days, a green veil spread over the bright tiles and dimmed their telltale glare.

But the count was not yet satisfied. Beneath his bedroom, buried in the depths of the thick foundation walls, lay the dungeon, shrouded in all the horrors of damp night solitude. Here the lords of the castle had left their enemies to die in those days, which the count wanted to recall with all the desires of his lustful spirit. Captured enemies, and disobedient, rebellious peasants. Their cries, sighs and curses had filled the thick darkness of the prison and had soaked into its walls with the dampness, which still seemed to be full of the sounds of despair that had died long ago. The rattling of the thick chain, which now, eaten away by rust, hung unused to the earth, had filled the torturer's dreams with pleasant images. Muffled by the rough and almost impenetrable stones of the ceiling, it came only in faint, tickling sounds to the sleep of the lord of the castle, giving him ceaselessly the pleasant feeling of power and satisfied vengeance.

Johann Count von Reutershahn wanted these merciless delights for himself, too. But it was difficult to get people to provide for the pleasures of the lord of the castle in this terrible dungeon. It was no longer possible, as it used to be, to simply chain up some unruly peasant. The people in the coarse, dirty shirts had received confirmation of their human worth through

the abolition of serfdom. This was very embarrassing, but there was no way around it.

The count found a tramp who, after much amicable coaxing, could be persuaded to sit in the dungeon for three days for a heavy piece of money. But already after six hours he screamed and clamored in earnest so terribly that he had to be let out. He ran away without waiting for the receipt of the earned part of his wages. At this, the count's anger and bad temper rose to dangerous and threatening levels, so that old Nepomuk had a strange idea. That was the time when the mechanical arts took a new upswing, in which all the whimsical gadgets of antiquity, the strange machines of the Middle Ages were repeated. Yes, completely new inventions came to life, which surpassed everything that earlier times had achieved in these things. In Brünn lived one of the greatest masters of these now forgotten arts. His figures worked with an accuracy and punctuality, but at the same time so unconstrained and without effort that they gave the most deceptive appearance of life. Master Primitivus Holtzböcher was summoned one day to the Count's castle by a messenger on horseback. A little astonished, the artist followed and let himself be driven in a sleigh to Horneck.

The lord of the castle received him in the cozy hall, in the fireplace of which enormous, fragrant fir logs were burning. The master was not a little startled when the count invited him for a drink from the mighty silver welcome mug. Then he heard the count's wish. He was to make an automaton that moved and, if locked in the dungeon and put on the chain, could rattle with it like a human being. The count had spoken excitedly and passionately. But the master remained silent for a long time, looking before him and then out of the window at the snow-covered waves of hills that went on dazzlingly. Then he said slowly:

"Count, to submissively obey your gracious wishes is my own and eager desire. But I fear not to be able to do so in this case."

"And why not?"

"In this beginning, which I would have to undertake according to your high-born command, lies a great danger."

"Ridiculous pretext. The task is too difficult for you."

"Count, no mechanical skill is alien to Primitivus Holtzböcher, nothing is too difficult."

"Then why not?"

"I fear the life of the figure."

"Explain yourself in more detail."

"We give these mechanical figures an impulse to life, with their deceptive shape and perhaps a piece of the seeds of life itself. But we cannot give them anything from our heart and its softness. They always remain hard and untouched like the components of their body, like iron and wood. Their life still has the cruelty of dead things. And if this cruelty were awakened, terrible things might happen."

"You are talking nonsense. I would have thought you more reasonable."

"It is not advisable to treat badly these strange beings that stand between us and the inanimate world. They might awaken and take revenge."

"This is sheer nonsense! I insist."

And as much as the master refused, the count still knew how to impose his will. He detained Holtzböcher at the castle and had his tools hastily brought to him from Brünn. The entire workshop arrived, and since the count's messengers had obeyed his order all too eagerly, all of the master's finished and half-finished figures had also come along. There the automatons stood among the tools of the trade in the castle courtyard, with sullen and cold faces, with unmoving limbs, as if reluctantly and suspiciously moving into this new house.

Holtzböcher began his work in the large, bright room next to the count's bedroom. And the lord of the castle spent almost the entire day with the artist. He was interested in every carved piece of wood, every screw and every scrap of canvas. Watching the creation of the "work", his imagination preceded the completion and imagined a living and feeling human being in the horrible dungeon under the bedroom. The master was seized by the spasm of creation and no longer heeded his own warnings. And after weeks of tireless work, the automaton was finished. It was a masterpiece of mechanical art, complete in the form and appearance of a human being. In the waxy face, which held the color of life, moved two touching and expressive eyes, in which was the look of a pleading for help, of a wounded animal. The natural hair fell simply parted. A hidden mechanism set the figure in motion. It walked around the room and managed to raise its folded hands with a pleading and desperate gesture. The artist had succeeded in expressing the agony to the point of frightening vividness.

Richly rewarded, Primitivus Holtzböcher left the castle. He remained gloomy and silent and expressed no joy at the completion of the work.

The automaton was put into prison clothes and chained in the cellar.

The keeper of the underground castle had the task of winding up the mechanism of the figure every evening. During the night, the rattling of the chain came to the count's sleep as if from distant hells. The illusion was so perfect that he even thought he could hear long-drawn sighs and agonized screams. And in these confused impressions rolled the rapture of this tormentor of a lifeless figure. One morning the Count's imagination was still so hot and vivid, the fever of a night spent in tense listening still so strong, that he had the strange prisoner brought out of the dungeon and flogged in the castle courtyard. But after the first blows, the servants paused, aghast and distraught. Red weals had become visible on the tattered convict's jacket and the whips had turned red, like the blood in front of a living, twitching, mangled back. The count laughed: this was, of course, the color with which the master had anointed the wood of the automaton, that red lead which was supposed to protect it against the destructive influences of the damp dungeon. But the servants looked irresolutely at the whips in their hands, and their crudeness, which would not have hesitated to smash the flesh of a living man to pieces, and recoiled from the sight of this bleeding automaton.

The night after this flogging, the rattling of the chains of the automaton gave the count a special delight. He remembered the one right of the lords of the castle, this merciless right to the body of the peasant girls. And since he could no longer use the force of command, he used the force of persuasion and his handsome and distinguished appearance. Without much effort he succeeded in inflaming one of the sturdy, healthy girls. And this man, who had coldly and superiorly followed the charms of the beautiful ladies of Vienna, now threw himself into a wild frenzy in the arms of the peasant women. Between the cries of his rapture there was the urgent clanking of the chains and a desperate moan that rose terribly from the dungeon.

In the morning followed a flogging and then another night of love and horror. None of the girls of the village dared to resist the count. His delights became more and more distorted, the louder the subterranean sounds of torture penetrated into his bedroom. Finally, in the small village, the count's selection was finished. There was only one girl left, who always brought the milk to the household of the castle in the morning. It was the bride of the locksmith Johann. The Count's lust for her also reached out. But his assaults were in vain. The girl did not submit to his wishes. And one day Johann

appeared before the count. With uplifted hands and tears in his eyes, he implored him to spare his bride. The count looked at the lad in amazement:

"What do you want?"

"Mercy, most gracious lord, she is my bride."

Then the count raised the whip, which he now always carried with him, and chased the lad out of the room.

Two days later the girl was his.

And now again a day later the locksmith entered the room where the count was sitting in front of an old book. It was the hour when the castle went to rest, just before the count's nightly festivities began. The meager oil light stretched its red flames in vain toward the lad's face, obscured by the shadows. He stood with the little lantern and a bunch of keys in his hands.

"What is it?"

"Most gracious sir, I have come from the dungeon. I think. , I think ... it's quite strange what's 'going on' with the figure. I think it has taken on quite a different face."

"Why?"

"It looks quite different now. Let the most gracious gentleman take a look."

The count stood up and closed his book. Then, doubtful and touched by a quiet horror, he followed the lad. The dim light of the lantern showed the way in the narrow passages that led between the rocks of the castle hill to the dungeon. Then the iron door creaked and the count entered. Behind him, the servant raised the light. There sat the automaton on a narrow ledge of the wall; the chains were tight and cruel around its legs and hands.

"Look, most gracious sir!"

And it really seemed as if a desolate change had warped the waxen face of the automaton. The color of life had given way from the cheeks to a pale gray, and the smoothness of the wax seemed streaked with wrinkles and folds like a spoiled skin. The bags of tears lay heavy under the wild, glowing eyes, which had lost their touching expression of helplessness and pleading. A harsh malice spoke from behind them, a relentless and searing, life-killing cruelty that led precipitously into the depths of horror.

The count wanted to take a closer look and hesitantly approached the automaton. At that moment, a roaring darkness suddenly fell over the figure and the dungeon, the heavy iron door crashed shut. . the screeching turn of the key, and then a whooping, horrible scream escaped down the narrow

corridor in front of the dungeon ... -

The castle was in great excitement over the disappearance of the count. It was already afternoon, and the lord had still not shown himself. Old Nepomuk had already been to the locked door of the bedroom twenty times and had listened. Not a sound. He anxiously peeked through the keyhole. Towards evening, it was as if he heard a muffled howling in the castle courtyard below ground. Trembling, he followed the sounds. And when he stood in front of the iron door, he heard, with raised hair, a screeching and roaring in which he thought he recognized remnants of his master's voice. Where was the locksmith? No one had seen Johann today. He had disappeared since yesterday evening. The locksmith had to be fetched from the village. After a long day's work, the door of the dungeon burst open. There the count sat on a wall protrusion, cruelly enclosed at legs and hands by the narrow chain, with protruding swollen eyes and slobbering mouth . . . The barely freed man had to be tied up again. He screamed for the automaton and lashed out. But the automaton was nowhere to be seen.

Then the maniac was carried to his bedroom. The door was locked from the inside. The locksmith had to use all his strength here, too. But when the servants crossed the threshold with the count's body, they dropped their burden and ran away screaming. In the count's bed, with his blanket pulled up to his neck laid the automaton with a harmless and satisfied expression on his face.

The Rebellion of the Blind

The blind are very unhappy with their new director. They haven't seen him, of course, but they know exactly what he looks like. Just like a professor, tall, a little bent forward, with cold eyes that thick glasses separate from the world.

"It's the eyes that matter," says old Hebenstreit, "the eyes make the man."

"That's why we're not human, because we don't have eyes." Dionys Finkel is a mischievous man and always gives old Hebenstreit a hard time.

But Kwapil, who used to be something like a natural scientist, likes exactness and puts it right:

"We have eyes, oh yes! But the eyesight is extinguished."

Old Hebenstreit is indifferent to the bickering. The main thing for him is that the eyes are what make a person. And everyone agrees that the new director's eyes are as cold as a dog's snout. If you don't see anything, you like to take your comparisons from the world of feeling.

Blum, the warden, has said that the director has two noses and that his mustache is so long that he can wrap it around his neck three times. But nobody believes Blum, not even someone who was born into darkness. One should not have asked him at all what the new director looks like, if one already knows that he always makes fun of the blind.

There is a poet among the blind. One who could have become a poet if the black curtain had not been drawn on him in his sixth year. Seckner speaks in verse when it matters, and he has many, many dramas and novels in his head. All completely finished, except for writing them down. But that's just it. The writing down. In putting these into laborious Braille all beauty and subtlety is lost. And what should be sublime becomes ordinary, what is sad becomes cold.

Seckner has seen the director for all of them. He first said that he has a pale face and a full black beard and that he leans forward when he talks to one. And now everyone knows exactly what he looks like.

Quite different from the deceased. He was red and fat and had a cozy goatee. But now he is dead and "now he sees just as little as we do," says the mischievous Finkel. It was different then. Blum wasn't so cheeky then, because he knew that the director would run over his muzzle if he teased the blind.

"My dear Kwapil, how are you?" the old director would ask in passing. Or "My dear Finkel." Or "My dear Hebenstreit."

But now: line up in the morning, like in the barracks. And then they read out coldly from somewhere: Asehner, Adler. Blaschek and so on. Whether everyone is there. Whether someone hasn't crawled into bed to laze around. To work! That is not friendly, as it used to be, but threatening and rude. To work! Spoken lashes, so that it claps through the air. To work! And whoever is just a little bit slow gets scolded. Basket weaving doesn't go as quickly as it used to, when harmless jokes fluttered into the darkness like night butterflies or large, gray birds whose wings are familiar to the darkness. If a loud word falls, then one hears immediately Blum:

"Will you be quiet! Eat yes . . . but work or you get nothing!"

Then the other beautiful facilities are also over. Gone! They don't have that anymore either, that they can walk in the beautiful, shady, old park like they used to.

The trees rustled so wonderfully, and Seckner used to say, "Now we're going under water, in a very clear, blue lake . . down on the bottom, and up above the wind and the waves are rushing."

Then it was so beautiful: to feel the cracked tree bark and to reach with your finger into the grooves of the ancient chestnut trees. The leaves again . . . they are so very different. Soft and cool. And when one touches a delicate jasmine blossom or a clump of robinia then he remained completely silent with delight and his fingers were as gentle as a mother against her child. Even Finkel kept his mischievous mouth shut. But . . . but that's over now.

The director needs the garden himself. For himself and his guests. The blind no longer hear the creaking of the large lattice gate that leads from the courtyard into the garden, and must remain in the courtyard between the sunny, glowing walls. So strong does the sun burn that even in the darkness of the deadest eye a faint gleam falls, and sometimes they hear laughter in the cool garden and the clink of thin-walled glasses. Then their faces rest against the iron bars and stare into the garden as if they wanted to see, until Blum chases them away from the grille, so that their lackluster eyes do not disturb the guests inside.

"What are you looking at? You can't see anything anyway."

Yes, with such blind people, who have no fortune and depend upon the country for charity, one does not make much trouble. Of course, they don't get pies and pastries every day. But lentils and potatoes every day is not

necessary either. The food is just terrible. They save on food, and Finkel, who is as hot as English mustard, claims that this is so the director and his friends have something to drink.

Finkel doesn't have to talk like that for long for everyone to believe it. A rage seethes in them that is grateful for every suspicion and invective. And even old Hebenstreit gets a hot head just thinking about all these things.

"What am I still alive for," he asks when he feels Seckner, "what for? For thirty years I was blind and I was always satisfied. But if one can’t even have something to eat. Jesus! . . ."

But no one dares to complain loudly. The new director has introduced a punishment that everyone is afraid of. A simple remedy. Anyone who complains is segregated from the others and locked in a narrow room at the end of a remote corridor.

"The Haze Castle," says Blum and laughs when people whisper about it. There, the rebel is put in and remains alone in the terrible loneliness of his blindness. Only twenty-four hours. Nothing more. But that's enough. When he comes out again, he is tame.

No one grumbles anymore. But in their souls dangerous beasts grow up. All beasts of a darkness in which love and patience, compassion and kindness have lost their ways. A new force is gradually pushing them off the track towards an abyss. And when they are alone for a moment, such sparks leap from their embers that a priest of humanity should tremble.

The hatred grows huge as fast as a desert storm whirls its yellow body from the horizon. And something is whipping their hatred, like the tormented bulls of the Spanish arena are made furious by incendiary arrows. A laugh. When they stand at the lattice of the shady garden that used to belong to their kingdom, sometimes a laugh comes over with the clinking of glasses. A laugh . . . that is so impudent and challenging, so voluptuous and pitiless. Everyone agrees on that. This is how the devil laughs, and the torment of this pitiless laughter is ten times as bad as all of Blum's chicanery and even than the delights of the Haze Castle.

Seckner also describes to them the woman from whom the laughter comes. She is tall, has white, white skin, and always wears a hat with black feathers over her reddish-blond hair. She wears cut-out silk blouses, with lace inserts on the chest and neck. She rustles over the gravel of the garden paths in thin, fragrant skirts, and the tips of her small patent leather shoes

crush snails. beetles and dull bees, all the careless little things that dare to come under her feet.

Blum speaks of Miss Mathilde with the mocking reverence one owes to the mistress of one's superior.

To dream of Miss Mathilde is regarded by the blind as an evil, ominous portent. And yet she passes through their dreams . ... often . . . with her insolent, tormenting laughter, exactly as Seckner described her. This finally becomes so bad that everyone imagines they are bewitched, and that things would only get better if this laughter were no longer here. But how are you supposed to make someone understand that? When visitors come, the director or Blum is always there. And when inspection is there, they find everything satisfactory and impeccable. No one dares to speak a word, for the dissatisfied face the prospect of the haze castle. And even if one takes it upon himself: how can one make someone understand what one can suffer from laughter?

Once, when Blum goes out for a moment and Kwapil, who sits in the workroom first, gives the signal, someone says:

"If we could kill them, everything would be better again. The food . . . and the park would be ours again and . . ."

They all feel that there is a tremendous shadow among them. And all feel staring at each other with empty eyes, as if they could still see; and as if they wanted to read each other's face. But the darkness lies on them like a mountain. And from it comes again that voice. so strange and cold.

"What will they do if we rise up against them? We fall upon them, noise is made, the newspapers write about it, and it gets better."

All at once old Hebenstreit cries out in a fearful voice, "Who is speaking?"

"Not me ... Not me ... I don't ... . ." –

Now, all of a sudden, none of them wants to have spoken.

Then Blum comes back again and scolds the laziness of the blind:

"Lazybones . . . Free-eaters . . ."

And everyone thinks at that moment of the words of indignation and hatred, the hot sound of which is still in the air.

And something of it remains in them, filling all the spaces of their bodies like a gas of tremendous expansive power and inflating them. When two of them pass each other somewhere, they whisper:

"If we all stick together, they can't do anything. The newspapers are

coming and making noise ... It has to get better."

"But the women," Seckner interjects. "The women have to be with us."

"Just don't start anything with the women," warns Finkel.

"Yes ... the broads have to be part of this!!!"

Finkel has no luck with his warning. Seckner is given the task of winning over the women. This is very difficult, because the women's quarters is strictly separated from the men's. All instincts become so strong and brutal when the wonders of vision are missing. Only sometimes a brief encounter in the corridors or in the courtyard. But Seckner does his job well. Over there, a great whispering arises, and all the women's rooms put their heads together until the guards become attentive.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter. Nothing at all. No - really nothing."

But that's what a blind man must see - that there's something going on.

And it's grumbling and rumbling in the underbelly of all these poor, neglected souls: We'll make her stop laughing ... it must get better.

But Miss Mathilde laughs on cool evenings as before, and the thin, delicate wine goblets clink to it. But her laughter is much brighter and thinner than the tinkling of the glasses. Now . . . on these wonderful nights the windows of the bedrooms are open and sometimes old Hebenstreit stands at the window with his violin and plays into the shadowy clarity. The notes are as shy and timid as children who have lost their way in the forest and now beg the night for mercy. They float over the tops of the garden trees like laments and questions from a distant land, quite unreal, like sounding miracles.

One becomes quite soft and melancholy and almost forgets to laugh. Miss Mathilde lets this go on for a few evenings. But on the fourth evening she asks ... her eyes glistening green:

"What is that disgusting whining?"

Hebenstreit is beside himself when Blum takes the violin away from him the next day:

The director said, "The whining must stop."

"I will no longer play in the evening."

"You won't play at all anymore."

That's brutal, that's crude, that's mean. Everyone is outraged. Their patience has run out. For three days they have been getting rotten meat and spoiled vegetables.

"So that the champagne does not run out," says Finkel.

It couldn't get any worse.

But one evening Blum comes into the sleeping hall at a very unusual time. Two or three other guys are tramping around by the door.

"So, my boys. You don't like it here. We are really sorry. But we can't help it. You have to be satisfied with us. Or maybe the gentlemen want to move out. Please, I'll have the gate opened. And so now the ladies also want to incite the gentlemen? Mr. Seckner has really been very kind and has gone to a lot of trouble. You dislike it so much, my boy. Well, I can give you a little change of air. The haze castle will do you a world of good."

And into the darkness of the blind falls the tumult of a fight at the door. One blind man against three guards. Seckner's shouting becomes fainter and fainter. From where he is dragged, one hears no sound at all.

But you can hear the laughter down in the garden. Some deep voice tells something, and the laughter sounds. Lashes and poisoned arrows! The red rage rushes. But with tense souls the blind are still silent.

And this tension does not let up for two days. For eight-and-forty hours, as long as Seckner sits in the dark. No one speaks a word. The work goes on in silence, and Blum and the director triumph. The deterrent has worked.

And then on the evening of the third day:

"So, Mr. Seckner, come in. I hope you have convinced yourself that it is still quite possible to live with us."

Seckner ... Seckner is here!

Seckner ... Seckner!! Old Hebenstreit is already standing by him, patting his hand over his face, grabbing him by the hand. Two fingers dangle from thin ribbons.

"Jesus . . . Seckner . . . Seckner ..."

Two fingers dangle from thin scraps of skin.

"Jesus . . . Seckner has two fingers bitten off . . ."

"The dogs!"

Just one scream. A single shout breaks the dam of tension.

"Kill them!"

The “Kill” howling and low, the “Them” bright and flat, like a slash of finality. "Kill Them!”

"Kill Them!"

And it is as if the entire house has suddenly become sighted. Not the

individual, but the whole collective has become sighted. The rage that blinds the seeing makes the blind clear-sighted. Like the body of a beast with fifty heads, the mob rushes forward. The scent of their rage leads them right. The beast finds Blum in the corner where he has crawled, corners him, traps him, and presses him against the wall. The arms with which Blum strikes into the melee are grabbed and pressed down. He falls. The blind men fall with him. They roll on the floor, tear off his clothes, and the fifty heads of the terrible beast snap at his bare chest.

"Kill Them!!"

A spasm flings their limbs together, twisting them into a tangle and dissolving the individual into the mass forming an organ of their common will. Blood . . . Blood ... beautiful, red blood ... as it trickles warmly over their hands, they all see the long-forgotten red burning before their extinguished eyes. Deep inside, from memory comes to them the impression of color. The arms twitch at the guard's neck and dig into the mangled face. With the mercilessness of iron machine parts, these blind grippers work. Like steel cramps or hooks, they tear the life out of the defenseless, crushed body with unerring certainty.

The other guards come running and try to attack the blind from behind. But the beast sees and hears on all sides, and abruptly snapping, the heads wheel around, the grappling pincers grip, and with the weight of a road roller, the guards are pinned to the wall and pushed toward the windows. The mortar crumbles from the edges of the window niche, and the sharp cracking of the breaking window panes slashes through the roar of the blind men.

Three bodies are lifted, pushed and hurled over the window sill. Three bodies plunge into the void and fall with dislocated limbs . . .

In the beautiful, shady park, among roses and jasmine, sits a small company. Their wine-lust has turned into a grimace of disgust. All of a sudden ... into their serenity the roar of the blind; like an avalanche crashing into silent valleys. A tumult above . . . Screaming, howling. An assault of daemons.

"That's Blum," says the director.

But he doesn't move.

And now the windows rattle, and the roar flows like seething lava ... Three bodies plunge into the void and fall with dislocated limbs. . .

"Oh . . ."

Mathilde jumps up and her eyes sparkle green.

"The blind have become raving mad!"

"They've left their darkness."

"They're killing the guards."

"They’re coming here . . ."

Really... they're coming... they are coming. Rumbling and roaring on the stairs. The many-headed beast rushes into the courtyard. This is not groping and searching, this is rushing forward. The united instinct of all individuals is a seeing will. The extinguished eyes stare straight ahead, but the collective whole bodies see and press toward the goal.

The gentlemen are pale and trembling. But Mathilde stands upright. and her eyes sparkle green.

"Quiet, gentlemen," whispers the director, "they don't know where we are."

But the blind know exactly, and already the door of the park gate creaks on its rusty hinges. A storm lifts them up. tears them from their bearings and throws them aside. The sand is crushed under the body of the huge beast, the bushes on either side of the path break . . .

"Halt!" The director steps forward.

The evening sun grazes the bluish barrel of a revolver. "Halt! No further! Are you mad, are you mad? How dare you!"

Roar.

"One more step and I'll shoot. I have a revolver and I'll shoot down anyone who moves. Against you I am foreseen to win."

Roar.

And then one, "Kill Them! Forward..."

The sand and the bushes are crushed.

Mathilde leans forward, "Are we in a state of self-defense?"

"Certainly."

She snatches the revolver from the director's hand and holds it up to the mob. A dark, empty eye stares back at a hundred empty eyes. The dark eye flashes. A short twitch in the animal, as if from a blow.

Mathilde laughs.

Roar.

The dark eye flashes at old Hebenstreit. His waving long gripping arms disappear in the moving mass.

And laughing, Mathilde fires the four remaining shots of the revolver.

So delicious . . . delicious .... to shoot at people.

But now . ... the grasping pincers are already stretching out . . . Escape. Quickly, crisscrossing, so that the blind can't follow.

Ponderously it roars behind them through the park.

At last . . . at last the other guards arrive, having fetched peasants from outside to help them. A long rope is quickly stretched in front of the path of the colossus.

The first stumble, fall . . . the others push after and fall. A tangle rolls on the grass and rolls apart on all sides. The animal is smashed to pieces, helplessly the poor blind crawl under the garden bushes and grope their way up. They are blind again, more helpless than ever, and offer no resistance when the guards now take them away one by one.

Between roses and jasmine they have to climb over some bodies. Finkel has felt old Hebenstreit fall beside him and now does not dare to ask if he is still there. Perhaps he is the one he just stumbles over with trembling legs. And no one dares to ask who else is there. They walk again all alone in the darkness and do not know who of them the night has devoured.

Somewhere under the trampled bushes still squats a fleeting laugh. It flutters up now and staggers into the ear of Finkel.

That laugh . . .!

Horror creeps down his spine with a thousand cold feet....

The Battle of the Lapiths and the Centaurs

Up on the hill they prepared the wedding feast. The pine trees stand in a semicircle around a round, sunny grassy spot and look over the hillside into the Peneus.

In the green, swift water, red-spotted trout leap and fall back flapping. A white foam gurgles around the mossy stones, and large bubbles of air rise to the surface.

A damp coolness moves from the river up the hill and settles in the semicircle of pines. The hot breeze from the plain bounces in vain against the dark rampart from the other side. The pine grove is impenetrable.

The pine grove whispers: The world is great and beautiful. . we are the fragrant hair of the earth . . . we wave towards the sun . . . and live . . . we give thanks, by reaching, to the light . . . whhh . . . wwwh . . .

The Peneus murmurs: Dear friends, I love you ... I love you ... I lo ... lo ... lo.... lo ... pff ... lov.... love you.

And tenderly it plays with small pieces of bark and twigs. It floats them into the still waters of the shore, rocks them, tosses them onto the bank, picks them up again, and never lets them rest.

Then it exuberantly splashes a small wave over the feet of the child playing there in the sand. A little boy ... completely naked . . . but he plays with a skillful eagerness and earnestness, as if he were building great cities. He sticks his foot in the sand and vaults sand over it again. Then he pats it with his hands until the arch is quite firm. Then he pulls out his foot and the cave house is finished. This is already the third one. His friend, the little centaur, stands beside him, watching with interest but wistfully. He can trot across the plain like an arrow, but he cannot bend his knees and dig in the sand.

A solemn chant comes from the hill.

The children look up. But in a moment they are playing again. Above, the celebration has begun.

Alkmene, the daughter of the Lapith prince, today becomes the wife of the centaur Nessos.

It is a marriage of convenience, a diplomatic marriage. Nessos loved Alkmene madly and fervently. For days he had roamed the forest, smashing his bristly head bloody against the trees. If someone came near him, he took his head between his front legs and kicked around with his hind hooves, so

that everyone was driven away neighing. Finally his clan realized that Nessos must have Alkmene. First they tried to persuade him against it, he should think carefully about it ... such a rough, wild forest centaur and this, delicate, cute, slim thing..... Alkmene. And anyway, there was no commerce for centaurs, among those nervous, strange, and quiet people, the Lapiths. That couldn’t be good. The Centaurs didn't get along with humans. And the Lapiths were much more refined and quiet than humans. But Nessos would not listen. He put his head between his forelegs and turned in a threatening circle.

Sighing, the clans gave in. A courtship delegation went to Adrestes, the father of Alkmene. From the dark mountain forests came the three closest relatives of Nessos to the gentle, sunny valley of the Lapiths. With tangled beards, defiant faces and potbellies, they stood somewhat embarrassed before the prince. Adrestes was startled at first. But he quickly composed himself. The 'courtship delegation' came to him at a good time. He had already wanted to send messengers to the centaurs himself. The high council had decided to invite them to an alliance. A short time ago, humans had come to the quiet meadow kingdom of the Lapiths. They had made a road and laid long black sticks across it. Always equidistant from each other. For weeks, humans and animals swarmed in the valleys of the Lapiths. At last it became quiet. But one day a black, snorting, fiery beast suddenly came running across the road. Its noise roared all the Lapiths out of their caves, and a gray stinking smoke settled over the valley and choked all the flowers. And after a short time another black beast came, and after a while from the other side . . . and so on. ... a few times every day.

The Lapiths now realized that the narrow road was the army road of the roaring beasts. Then they tried to tear away the black bars, to shatter the beams, to destroy the road. But their delicate fingers bent under the futile efforts, their nails broke ... it was in vain. Then they thought of the centaurs in the mountain forests. They were also enemies of the humans . . .

Adrestes agreed to the courtship of Nessos. It was a high price, but it had to be done.

They prepared the wedding feast on the hill of Peneus, the border of the two kingdoms, where the mountain forests die in the plain.

Three flute players strode ahead; they were tall, slender Lapith boys. And they were followed by twelve maidens from the prince's kin. They wore red roses in their hair and sang:

“Red roses around the head!
Red roses, soft chains
Are they to you.
Their scents are like soft hands.
And they caress you.
And they caress you with red roses around your head.”

It was a soft, sweet song. The centaurs, stamping behind with ponderous hooves, shook themselves. They couldn't stand that kind of thing. It was too soft. They wanted songs like roaring torrents, like tumbling firs.

In their midst trotted the groom. His eyes glowed under the thick tufts of hair that lay across his brow.

Then came the procession of Lapiths. With sullen, disgruntled faces, they led Alkmene to the celebration. The bride was restless and her gaze sought out slender Laomedon, whom she loved.

In the pine grove was an old sanctuary of Demeter. A dilapidated, small temple, whose roof had collapsed, and between whose stones the forest moss was growing. Here stood an urn, in which the lots made unmistakably known the fate of the future couple.

The flute-blowers and virgins stood outside and let the procession of wedding guests pass by. The Lapiths stepped lightly and freely over the temple debris. The Centaurs could not accustom their eyes to the twilight and stumbled over the stones. Old, mischievous Chiron began to rant quite loudly.

Adrestes stepped up to the urn and threw two sticks into it . . . one black and one white.

There was complete silence.

Only old Chiron grumbled to himself further back, because he had sprained his foot a little.

Some Lapiths turned indignantly:

"Well . . . Adrestes put his hand into the urn and pulled out a chopstick. Everyone pushed forward. He opened his hand. It was a black chopstick.

An anxious murmur went around among the guests:

"Misfortune . . . worries . . . need . . . no children. . . . annihilation. . ."

Alkmene covered her head. Laomedon wanted to step forward, to hurry to her. But some centaurs stood in his way. Under their disheveled beards they mumbled confused things. In the back, some laughed out loud. They

had not the slightest respect for the oracle.

Nessos looked a little embarrassed at the crying Alkmene and at the black stick that Adrestes still held in his hand. Then he reared his upper body, and his lips drew back from his yellow teeth.

"Ah, whatever," he growled, turning his backside to the sacred urn. A blow with his hoof, and the shards flew about. Adrestes and the Lapiths turned pale with horror. They were terribly frightened . . . now the lightning was certain to come down and strike the centaur dead. But nothing happened. Not a cloud, not a thunder . . . The sun lay comfortably over the temple debris as before. A trembling fear and a furious anger seized the silent Lapiths. They recognized the deep gulf between their kind and the kind of the centaurs.

But Nessos snatched the weeping Alkmene and led her out of the temple to the wedding feast.

The flute-blowers and the maidens advanced. But the notes stuck in their throats and came out bruised and shrill as often as they saw the shaggy hair of Nessos playing around the white breasts of Alkmene.

The two sat at the top of the long table, in a semicircle of pine trees. Around Alkmene's bare legs blew the cool breeze of the river. She looked depressed. Nessos drank from the large, precious Lapith cup without even paying attention to its noble artistic and figural work. To their left, down the table, sat the Lapith Colonel Adrestes. To the right sat the Centaurs. Straight across from him was old, mischievous Chiron. He made incessant remarks about the young couple to his neighbors. The Lapith twisted his mouth in agony, the Centaur frequently burst into a roaring laugh.

It was very sad at this wedding celebration. Only the centaurs smacked and made noise. The Lapiths remained silent and ate almost nothing.

The flute-blowers and virgins struggled with new, sweet melodies.

At last Chiron cried, "Oh, enough of this tootling and whistling! . . . Now we finally want to hear centaur music . . . what? . . . hoho!"

And he pulled out of the leather pouch that hung around his neck a whistle carved from a horse bone. The whistle had only two notes and tore the air with a jagged yelp. Chiron cradled his head and blew. And the shrill notes brought life to the centaurs. They began to paw and stamp their hooves. They clattered their jugs on the table. The Lapiths covered their ears. The shouting and stomping hit them like a torrent of water. It reverberated in them like the beating of a club.

Nessos had become very talkative. With the comfort of a drunken centaur he spoke to Adrestes.

"Of course, of course . . . don't be afraid. Tomorrow we'll be on our way. Tomorrow we'll kill all the black beasts with the long tails. You know how ... simple, very simple ... we hold on to its rump. Then it will move its head around . . . will want to bite us . . . But we will turn around and knock its eyes out with our hooves. Then it will writhe in the grass and won't see us. And we will dance around on her and trample her ... That's how! ... Hey?!?"

Adrestes half turned away. A fetid breath wafted toward him from Nessos' mouth. The centaur pulled Alkmene to him and laughed, "But tonight, no, not yet tonight . . . isn't that true. Sweetest . . . tomorrow . . . tomorrow."

Alkmene braced her fist against his chest and tried to break away. Nessos didn't even notice and continued:

"Yes . . . Adrestes . . . oh . . . That was the right thing for you, when Nessos asked for Alkmene ... you got a son-in-law as well as a confederate . . . Oh. you clever ones ... you act as if you were...."

Chiron's whistling and the noise of the centaurs was deafening. An unknown and hideous thing welled up inside each Lapith. They felt it gaining more and more power over them. It filled them almost completely. What was it? Anger? . . . Rage? Shame? . . . What were they doing here, in the circle of these singing, roaring un-animals. They, who after all had experienced the refinements and highest summit of all things in themselves, who were so much above and higher than the humans. Here they sank into the noise of the roaring forest people.

They sat there with clenched fists, powerless in their anger, so aware of their weakness.

And Nessos kept talking to Adrestes, more and more urgently and rambling. His fetid breath flowed in heavy waves over the prince's face and chest. Across the pine grove came a whistle. Long, high and trilling. Quite different and even more powerful than Chiron's whistle. Everyone listened.

Nessos laughed: "Ho . . . ho! ... There it is. The black beastie. Want to get her already . . . tomorrow . . . not tonight . . . I need something else . . . yes. . . Dear friend, you have done well to take us as your confederate."

Another whistle from afar.

"Now it has its back to us," murmured Adrestes.

Nessos pulled Alkmene to him, "Yes . . . Tonight . . .His wet beard wiped around her shoulders. His whisper was a wafting stench. A sudden disgust rose in Alkmene. She struck him in the face with her fist, tore herself away, and ran.

Nessos laughed, rose heavily, and trotted after her. But Laomedon had risen and was waiting for him with glittering eyes. When Nessos wanted to pass him, he struck with his silver cup with all his might against Nesso's head.

Nessos thought it was in fun and shook himself off good-naturedly. But he looked into a pale face distorted with rage.

And all the Lapiths had jumped up and faced him threateningly.

Then Nessos saw that this was getting serious.

Quick as a flash, he turned on his front hooves. Two blows - and Laomedon flew sideways to the ground.

But then someone jumped on his back, clutched his neck and was choking him.

The centaurs only now came to. With a mighty leap they jumped over the table, tearing the table cloth and all the dishes to the ground. Chiron grabbed Adrestes who was sitting on the back of Nessos and choking him. He lifted him high and strangled him in the air.

The others dealt kicks and stamped on the bodies of the fallen.

But the Lapiths snatched the sharp and pointed table utensils, the knives and chopsticks, ran under the Centaurs to their horse bellies and thrust into them. Chiron was the first to fall. He rolled onto his side and flailed around with all four feet. He tried to get up, fell back, and got as far as the slope of the hill. Suddenly he started rolling and rolled across the soft green grass to the bank of the Peneus. A dark streak of red spots remained in the lush green of the grass.

His heavy body fell among the playing children. The two had heard nothing in the fervor of their play. There lay Chiron before them, bleeding from a stomach wound.

"There . . . look up there," he called to them.

The children saw the commotion on the hill.

And in an instant the inherited hatred of the two widely different races flared up in them. They ran at each other, choking and clawing.

It was a diminished image of the terrible fight on the hill. The Peneus clouded its mirror and roared more strongly and grimly. It, too, was seized

with the joy of battle and of annihilation.

Chiron rattled in passing away. But his breaking eye still looked complacently at the battle of the little ones. The two wrestled with all the lust of the great ones. The small centaur pushed the Lapith to his knees. But the latter broke away and crawled under his belly, working him with his little fists.

The Peneus murmured and hurriedly washed with short waves the piece of shore on which the two wrestled.

At last . . .

A stamping hoof beat ... a clod of earth broke loose ... sank ... a foaming and splashing. A broad wave carried the two into the middle of the river, where the rushing current caught them. They clung to each other and sank . . . emerged . . . sank again without letting go . . . and remained submerged. -

On the hill, the fight was over. It had been a fierce battle. Nessos was the only one still alive. His head and flanks were bleeding. He stood and stared at the corpses.

There lay his friends all jumbled up. And all the Lapiths. Who would have believed these gentle and silent ones? Also the flute-blowers and the virgins were dead. Alkmene had thrown herself over the body of Laomedon and had been crushed to pulp. Nessos had also stomped on her. He did not know why. Everything was barren inside him. He thought nothing more.

His hooves were bloody to the top and quite slippery. His legs were shaking.

Some centaurs had uprooted pine trees and knocked them around. The trunks lay across the pile of corpses, crushing arms, legs, and bodies beneath them and bending the precious vessels. One tree lay across Adrestes. It distended his belly out and made his legs stand out quite stiffly.

Night came over the plain.

Nessos looked for Alkmene. He did not find her. Her body had become completely unrecognizable.

A whistle came over the pines.

Nessos raised his head. It was the black beast! This beast . . . and it was the cause of the disaster . . . the cause? wh-why? He did not know . . . but it was ... he had to tear it apart, trample it.

He ran through the forest so that the pines recoiled in fright.

Down the hill ... into the plain ... there was the valley through which

the army path of the beasts led . . . and there was the narrow road with the black bars.

Beyond the bend came the whistle, very near and very loud. It had become almost quite dark.

Nessos thought: I wonder if I will be able to see it.

Then it came around the bend, with two red, glowing eyes. Snorting and rattling.

Nessos took a running start and trotted toward the beast on the army road. Faster . . . faster and faster. . his gaze fixed on the glowing eyes.

Now . . .

Now....

Now There. . . Nessos tried to grab the animal. But it grabbed him with a thousand claws ... a thrust that went through his whole body.....

At the same time, the locomotive grabbed the centaur and pushed it under its wheels. The body wrapped itself around the wheels in a frenzied twisting, was strained to the utmost, and then tore apart . . . The shreds wrapped around the rims. For a while there was still a crunching and cracking from the broken bones. -

The engineer and the stoker heard the noise.

The engineer leaned over and looked out. Nothing.

"It must have been another cow that got lost."

The engineer grumbled.

"I never thought people paid so little attention to their cattle."

"Hm," said the stoker and spat.

Haukeli Mountain

We had passed the top of the pass. Peter Fraim clicked his tongue and Rapfot immediately started trotting, pricking up his ears and moving his clever head up and down incessantly.

I tried to lean back, startled for the hundredth time at finding no back rest, and swung forward again. My friend and traveling companion, the finance commissioner, grumbled something grim about the discomfort of the Norwegian travel carts. Financial commissioners are always dissatisfied with their situation.

In front of us stretched icy Haukeli Mountain, and the barren plateau of the Telemarken province. A jumble of bare, gray rock faces, scree slopes,

frozen lakes and snow fields. Monstrous boulders lay scattered everywhere, as if a city had been destroyed here by giants. We passed through a tunnel, which here, at a place of the road accessible to the wind and covered by immense masses of snow, led as if through a mountain of glittering sugar. At the bend in the road we saw again the line of carts ahead of us, crossing the mountain in the same direction as we did.

"There they go!" said my friend, "there they are!" And we tried to spot the little things crawling over the snow far away from us in the distance. There was the "Strawberry Eater," the man who had already attracted our attention on the ship because of his appetite for strawberries who had had a falling out with Nahm, and who had now been eating our favorite food at every hotel table for seven days. Then there was the "State School Inspector"; with a round full beard, fat, golden glasses and a lean, narrow-chested wife. Two American ladies in black, Mr. "Pollak from Gaya", the "Merchant" together with his wife - a selection of those unsympathetic persons, such as the coincidence of travel usually brings together. And there . . . right in front. . there was the strange couple about whom we had been talking for three days now and breaking our heads over. They were the main thrust of our evening conversations, during which we always consumed so many bottles of beer, much to the dismay of the hotel staff. A man with the neck of a bull and the face of a bulldog, whose red hands you could see were always wet with sweat, and a young woman of a very rare and foreign beauty that inflamed and at the same time made one as cold as ice.

The carts disappeared between boulders and hills, and Rapfot walked carefully through the soft snow, from which small veins of water ran toward the river, which emerged there between the high walls of a gorge and flowed zigzag across the plain as if undecided about its destination. The brown-red back of our horse and the blue sky were the only loud colors in this monotony of gray and white. The murmur of the spring waters and the roar of the river sang songs of a solitude that is great and sublime and that kills life. I had forgotten about my traveling companion and the world I was connected with through him, and my imagination created a monstrous and strange dream.

Such was the world in the Ice Age; such must have been the land of the Edda. In such a terrible wasteland the adventures of the giants and the gods played out. Even more gloomy to me seemed the barren plain, and from the ravine over there came forth one. A horrible monster, tall as a mountain and

covered with a thick coat of hair. The shaggy mane around his head was torch red, and his hideous fists held a girl pressed to his breast. Her naked body trembled with revulsion and disgust. In one jump he leaped the river and, laughing, looked behind him for his pursuer. A giant, almost as tall as the raider, but more orderly, a giant already touched by the spirit. The pursuer ran up and down the riverbank, looking for a place where he could jump across. But the giant let the girl slide into the snow next to him and hurled a pebble into the river. Immediately it swelled and flooded the plain, forcing its way between the enemies like an arm of the sea. The pursuer frothed up with rage and seized a monstrous boulder, which he whirled high through the air. But even so fierce and powerful a block fell into the stream and was immediately carried away like a straw. The giant lifted the girl again and pressed her to his chest. She braced her white arms against his shaggy fur and turned away from him with hot cries, throwing herself desperately over backwards and beating her delicate fists against his chest. A ray of beauty struck me from her pale face. The giant laughed, grasped the wriggler only more tightly, and strode away with long, booming strides, from whose force the clear outlines of the mountain ranges quivered. The pursuer clenched his fists on the other shore of the foaming, roaring sea and shouted wild insults at the raider. Words that were like boulders, heavy and jagged, from a primeval, incomprehensible language. Sometimes the giant would stop and laughingly return the insults with words even more unruly, harsh and threatening than those of his enemy. He strode toward the edge of the mountain and disappeared behind its spikes, which were like the spikes of a sleeping dragon. A plaintive cry rose above the roar of the river, born of fervent longing and the most ghastly despair, the cry of a dying woman . . . "Haukeli . . . Haukeli!"

"Falcon’s Roost!" said Peter Fraim behind me, pointing ahead with the tip of his short whip,

"Aha!" added my traveling companion. "High time! I'm hungry as hell."

There before us was a throng of carts and people around the lonely hotel in the middle of the Haukeli plateau, where the two caravans of travelers must meet. There were all our dear friends, the strawberry eater, the merchant, the American women. The travelers crowded into the dining room, from the ceiling of which the carved faces of monsters glared down. There was a mad rush for the best seats, which sweeps away even the most

well-behaved people at hotel feedings. We were looking for a place as far away as possible from the strawberry eater. Down there, just across from the odd couple, were two empty chairs. A polite bow, a nod from the gentleman across from us, then we settled down. The fish was served. The woman across from us let the bowl pass by. When her husband spoke to her almost urgently and threateningly, she kept shaking her head.

Her strange beauty seized me. I knew that the fate of this woman was connected with a great experience of my soul. It was one of those faces that pass sadly by in a foreboding dream, or suddenly shine out of an old, half-blind mirror in the deep twilight of a winter evening. And a great anger in me wanted to hit the man with the bull neck and the bulldog face, the brutal guardian of this wonderful mystery, in the face.

The woman did not eat a bite during the whole meal and endured in silence the reproaches of her husband, which became louder and louder and more threatening. Once her glance met mine, and it seemed to me that in her gray-white eyes gleamed the desolate solitude, the rigid grandeur of Haukeli Mountain. I forgot the company around me and did not see that the strawberry eater at that moment had almost completely emptied a bowl of strawberries intended for the lower end of the table.

Towards the end of the meal, the wife got up and went out in silence.

Her husband was engaged in an animated conversation with my friend and traveling companion. They were speaking English. I didn't understand a word of it, nor did I bother, for I was thinking of the slender, silent woman. And after a quarter of an hour I followed her.

I found her on a hill behind the wooden buildings of the hotel, which overlooked Haukeli Mountain for miles. A light wind had risen and pushed large balls of cloud over the jagged edges of the mountains, which lay there like the spiky crests of sleeping dragons. And you could see how the light died in turn on the wide snowy plains, the frozen lakes and the white-grey rubble heaps, when the cloud balls passed in front of the sun.

I stepped up to the young woman and leaned on the railing of the bench she was sitting on.

"A wonderful sight, this Haukeli Mountain. I wanted to see it in winter and during storms."

The woman bent her head back and looked at me calmly. In her eyes was the soul of loneliness. “...I do not understand," she said, but she must have understood my look, because stretching out her arm and pointing out

to the river where I had dreamed the giant fight earlier, she said in a deep and trembling voice: "Haukeli. Haukeli!"

And it was as if she had cast a spell for suddenly I recognized in her features the fairy-tale beauty of the stolen girl, and her slender body trembled in fear and disgust. Her arm sank down, and she leaned against the bench, pale and trembling.

But before I could assist her, a commanding call came from the house, and she rose, nodded fleetingly at me, and left.

In front of the hotel it had become lively, the small, enduring horses were harnessed in front of the two-wheeled travel carts, and the two caravans of travelers, who had united here for a short lunch break, parted in opposite directions. My traveling companion still felt an appetite for a bottle of beer and our fellow travelers were meanwhile driving away from us. Oswald was very silent, and I did not feel the need to share my thoughts with him.

Only when we boarded the wagon, and Rapfot started moving at a slight click of Peter Fraim's tongue, did he say, lighting a cigar, "Strange story!"

"What?”

"Well, the story about the young woman. He's told me all about it now."

"Well, what? What?"

"They've been married for three years and travel almost six months a year. She used to pester him to go to Norway with her, but he preferred to be in the south, so together they traveled to Spain, Italy. Greece, Egypt. This year her requests became so urgent that he gave in. Ever since she was a child, as long as she can remember, she has longed to travel the north. He put together the tour and when he read her the name Haukeli Mountain from the travel guide, she went into convulsions and fainted for a long time. Now, since they started the journey through Telemarken, a strange transformation has been happening to her. She doesn't speak, she doesn't sleep, and she only looks around with fixed eyes. For three days she has not eaten a single bite . . . and. ... her features are even beginning to change."

We sat in silence again. What were we to say about such things? I had long since given up trying to understand it all.

The road led steeply down the valley. The river had torn an enormous crevice in the bedrock, in the depths of which it roared in white eddies, and

on the vertical walls of which the road descended in serpentines. At each bend, our cart narrowly passed the curbs - and we looked from our seats into the abyssal cauldrons, from which the water vapor boiled up like a cloud . . . . Peter Fraim and Rapfot drove calmly and did not think of moderating their speed. The rocking of the travel cart became stronger and stronger. If one bumped into one of the curbs, or if the horse shied...

We came around a ledge of the rock wall and saw a collection of wagons in front of us, a jumble of people, confused, perplexed, without order. There had been an accident. I clearly felt something inside me, perhaps my heart, being seized with a large pair of pincers and slowly squeezed shut. And for a moment it was completely quiet inside me.

There was a broken cart at the side of the road, in front of which stood a horse trembling in all its limbs; it had to be held by three strong Norwegians in order not to break free. The travelers were wailing and complaining, to which the Norwegians countered with their wordless calm. What had happened? The horse . . . the carriage . . . Finally Peter Fraim told us that two travelers and a coachman had been thrown into the abyss. The Norwegians had already initiated a rescue operation - wordlessly, stoically and skillfully as always - and the bodies of the victims were being brought up with ropes.

It was our strange couple. The husband and the coachman were crushed to a pulp, shapeless lumps of bloody flesh. The young woman, however, was perfectly preserved, not the slightest wound was visible on her entire body: death had not dared to hurt her. On her face was the smile of a contented child.

The Weathercock

High above the city, on the top of the old tower stood the weathercock. The tower rose from the mouldering roof of the town hall, and with German tenacity, broad-tracked, square-edged, and ponderous, it strove toward the sky. A golden-green-blue dome arched above its gray, somewhat sullen walls. When the sun shone on these hot, confused colors, a glow went from them far out into the land. It was a calling, a shouting, and on the days when the youthful power of spring worked from the sun, a whooping and a rejoicing. From the dome a cheeky, merry metal rod poked skyward, coarse and high-spirited like a peasant who wanted to scuffle with St. Peter. Then a

small, shiny ball sat on it, a gilded strawberry on a long arrow. And at the top was the weathercock.

He saw the sun first and still saw it when the streets were already gloomy and the lights of business and pleasure flared up. When the clouds were low and poured rain, their gray pads were very close above his head. He had first of everything and enjoyed it the longest. So he sat gloatingly crouched on his pommel and gazed into the city with his mischievous, clever eyes. His metal wings shimmered in an ugly, poisonous green and it was often as if he wanted to flutter up crowing. But he did not do so - at least no one had seen him yet - but stood and turned to the wind. A sneaky, mischievous fellow.

This is how the student Philipp Zörner, who lived on the third floor of a house opposite the tower and knew the rooster better than anyone in town, felt about him. He saw him as a symbol. The weathercock was for him the image and sign of the frivolous spirit, of lechery, of vile love, of all bad and reprehensible degenerations of the senses. An unfaithful, unpredictable, limited spirit which possessed power over the lower instincts. It was the symbol of the brutal forces of nature that mediate reproduction. And Zörner was so much an aesthetic, an aesthetic down to the last nerve fibers, that these forces with all their ugliness and their undeniable urges were disgusting to him. Even in his Bible-believing childhood, the rooster, at whose crowing Peter had betrayed the Lord, had been a hated beast to him. He threw stones at all the roosters in the neighborhood and even once really hit a beautiful, expensive animal. He was beaten and punished by hunger; since then Philip did not throw stones at the roosters anymore, but he hated them even more.

Now the rooster stood there high above the city, on the highest of all the towers. It was like a triumph of the mean. So many good and decent people lived there in these houses and tolerated this incessant jubilation of victory, this exultant symbol of lust high above their heads. Zörner was not a bigot, but he was an idealist of love. Love was something so pure to him, so completely alien to earth, that no thought of the physical desires and actions that coalesced for him in the symbol of the cock should approach it.

Until now he had kept away from all the love affairs of his high school days. The great love should come suddenly; hit him unprepared, like an undeserved gift, like a flash of great beauty in his simple and devotional life. He waited. And one day love did come, not with a splendid appearance,

but as quietly and almost unnoticed as the finest and most exquisite pleasures are wont to enter quiet parlors. She was only a very simple girl, but she had the grace of happy unworldliness, was a little shy and hesitant. Philip hardly dared to demand anything from her shyness. And yet he had to demand something, because she was a saleswoman in a tobacconist's shop, and he had come to buy cigars. Philip immediately tripled his spending budget on smoking needs, and each purchase kept him in the little store longer.

It was a love that was good for his quiet soul. No noise, no big city noise in the somewhat secluded alley. Almost rural, it stretched toward the nearby fields and reminded the student of his youth frolicking in the countryside.

It went on like this for a few weeks. And it would have gone on like this, if Eva had not once emphatically emphasized that she was longing for an excursion. Tomorrow Sunday afternoon . . . Philip was silent and did not understand. Then Eva herself asked him to go with her tomorrow.

A deep, soul-blue summer day. They drove to the outskirts of the city and all the blossoming and maturing settled into their senses. The little things and glooms of the city were far away; Eva had forgotten the cares of her tiny household and Philip his ordeal. A country meal in a village inn, buttered bread and beer. Across the table they touched hands and looked into each other's eyes. Then a small boat trip on the narrow river, in whose reeds the oars rustled. When its frightened, anxious waves began to ignite in the evening glow, they returned home.

They saw the city from the mountain above the river. The houses and streets already lay in the secluded violet haze of evening, above which rose the hill with the old fortress in dirty yellow. Still higher rose the town hall tower with its jaunty peasant spike and with the weathercock on its knob.

"Look, the cock, it is as if cut from a green, transparent stone," said Eva, stopping.

"Go on, leave that ugly critter alone."

"But it's not a critter at all." She laughed. "It’s a brass weathercock."

"No, it’s a nasty, sneaky critter. I'm glad you don't know what it means. That weather vane is called something else entirely. It's caused me a lot of trouble already. Come!"

But Eva had become curious.

"What does it mean?"

She stopped and resisted the tugging of her beloved. Even more glaring and taunting than before, the metal plumage of the rooster shimmered.

"Well, I just can't stand the rooster. You see, as a Germanist, I have studied the poems of our greatest poets. I find in many an, albeit unspoken, aversion to this animal. I almost want to compare myself with Wallenstein, who could not hear the cock crow. And it is not for nothing that Mephisto, as a Junker, has a cock's feather in his hat."

"But why?"

"I beg you, don't ask me. It's one of those things I don't like to have between us. Come!"

But Eva did not cease to ask, and tormented Philip with her childish and rash conjectures. Disgruntled, they returned home. Philip quickly took his leave, and Eva defiantly let him go without a last, kind word. When he stepped to the open window of his apartment, the rooster stood darkly over against the lighter night sky, turning slowly in the breeze that came from the cool forest. Philip shook his fist at him grimly, and it seemed to him as if the rooster moved its wings and stretched out its neck, crowing. A victorious sound that sounded like a creak. Philip laughed, but he felt as if a shiver threatened his soul and as if someone was standing behind him in the dark room. He quickly turned around, turned on the light, and sat down resolutely at the desk.

The next morning he carried a manuscript to the editor of the newspaper that had often carried his literary-historical and critical works. It was an essay on the rooster in poetry. In its delicate way, it merely hinted at what he wanted to say, and concluded with the admonition to remove the rooster, this symbol of impurity, from all public places. The editor read over the work, looked at Zörner in amazement, and returned the manuscript to him. He regretted not being able to publish this article. It seemed to him somewhat confused, yes; even Zörner might apologize - quite contrary to his usual manner of writing. Perhaps after a thorough working through . . .

Zörner left and tore the manuscript into small shreds. Eva received him somewhat coolly and asked him if he had perhaps dreamed of the weathercock. Philipp thought he could hear insidiousness in her words, which still lurked beneath her open features, her simple, guileless soul, which enjoyed this childlike teasing. It seemed to him that he was under a threatening shadow. The ghost of the cock strode past in its ridiculous and terrible form. Philip's agitation turned into harsh words. But the girl's

defiance grew, and they parted unreconciled.

He ran home, locked the door and wanted to immerse himself in his studies. But between the lines, in a different, strange print, was what he had written in the now torn manuscript. They were green sparkling letters, very small but sharp, radiating a poisonous light and blurring the sober, black, modest lines of erudition. His thoughts snaked into a wicked tangle when he thought of science, and they stood clear and firm at once when he directed them to the poisonous green letters. He realized there was a bad guest in his blood, the same one who was looking over there from the town hall tower. And when the pain of this split overwhelmed him, he jumped to the window, gasping. Over there, the weathercock was frivolously turning in circles. A sharp wind had come out from between the divide in the mountain in the west and was pushing up a heavy, black-blue wall of clouds.

Philip stood at the window and felt with delight the rattling of the storm wind. Then the weather broke loose as if all the cauldrons of hell were exploding. There was an incessant zigzagging across the whole sky. Like ravenous dragons, the lightning, glowing with greed and lust, drove to the earth. And it seemed as if they all came from one point of the sky, from that point in front of which the weathercock stood black and huge. As if in the center of the thunderstorm, he stretched himself on his tower knob, turning incessantly in the whirl, and it seemed to Philip as if he heard it's screeching crowing. The lightning wove a luminous tangle around it, the destructive halo of its infernal power. Philip finally slammed the windows and shut the curtains. Now he had peace. Now he could think.

And he found that he had fallen into a dark stream, from which he must not let himself be carried away. He had once been on the Danube, had lost the oars, and his barge had been carried away by the current. He felt as helpless now as he had then. The banks were running toward him and past him, and there was no hope of reaching them. Here it was necessary to be prudent. After all, what did he want? It was natural that Eva had mocked him with his refusal, since she did not know his reason. She did not know the reason. And she should never get to know it. He wanted to keep his love in the pure precincts of spring.

The next day he came softly and peacefully to Eva and found her also in a quiet, tender languor. And now followed another long series of happy hours, blossoming with great vigor and sunny fragrance in the little corner

of the little-visited store. If Eva sometimes still touched her beloved's inexplicable aversion with quiet teasing, he evaded it with a painful yet gentle smile. He had gathered his strength and decided to avoid any thought of the hideous animal. That was why he had given notice to leave his room the next month. He didn't want to see the rooster outside his windows anymore.

Then came another Sunday, when the power of the sun was so great that everything became intimate and joyful devotion. Philip and Eva went out again and climbed up the forest away from the stream of ordinary excursionists. They lay in forest clearings, they broke through thickets of brambles, they raced down steep slopes, and they jumped over the stream laughing. They threw flat pebbles across the pond, admired the overgrown burnt ruins of an old mill, and finally stopped at the inn near the railroad station.

It was much as it had been then, buttered bread and beer. Only now it was not so peaceful, because at the table next door sat a noisy company. Some young men and two or three women. Their merriment had a rough sound; their joy came not from their hearts but from their stomachs. One did not notice anything of the magic of harmony. The women laughed loudly and tossed about in their chairs. A cheeky young fellow with a black mustache and shining, dark eyes kept looking over to Eva; the girl became restless and sat down so that her back was turned to him. But she felt his gaze under her topknot; it palpated her neck, and slid along the lines of her back to her hips. Eva felt the eagerness of his eyes, became embarrassed, and the red flames of indignation rose in her silent face. Philip, too, was disgruntled. So they left.

Evening came hesitantly and fearfully among the spruces, giving to the fragrance of the forest its sweetness and its ever-waking desire. In the narrow valley it rustled up the slopes as if the shadows that had crouched under the bushes during the day came alive with broad, black wings.

Suddenly Eva threw herself crying at her beloved's neck. He stood, rooted his legs into the ground and held her tight. This is how he wanted to protect her. Like this. From everything; even from the confused desire of the senses. Her twitching, moist lips slid over his chin, seeking his proud mouth. The expression of her great womanly love became a living glow in this kiss. It was completely silent. Only in the dark forest the soul of the night rustled and the splendor of the blue-black sky seemed to vibrate like

bells. Now the student quietly pushed the girl away from him and wanted to go on gently. But Eva threw herself against his neck again. She was no longer crying. Her body quivered and jerked against him. Under her pressure, his muscles tensed and returned her urging. And a new glow suddenly filled his body. His senses understood all at once the woman's wooing. It was as if he had to sink here, he felt how he was surrounded by a great wonder.

But - then he threw himself up with a jerk. What was this? What was it that was about to come over him? What had lulled him and made his senses so aroused? This was his old enemy, the eternal adversary of all goodness and beauty. The shadow of the cock flew over his soul. Was it to come to this? With all his strength he pushed the girl back. She staggered and fell! A soft, painful cry. It was as if the student heard a clink of his own, as when a precious glass breaks.

The forest stood gloomy and desolate around the two, the night was dark and scentless, and the narrow valley smelled of the damp leaves decaying on the ground, like must and mold. Two people, strangers to each other, stood alone in darkness and wasteland.

It was a silent way home and a sad journey. The train carried them as if into a nocturnal realm of hopelessness, and no cuddly friendliness brightened their farewell.

As Philip stood at his window and heard the metal rooster crowing, a burning rage rose in his throat. He thought of buying a gun the next day and shooting the animal down. A bullet would already carry over there, and he would probably hit it. But then he had to laugh himself. That was nonsense, madness. What did the weathercock have to do with the excited senses of a store girl? Yes, she was a store girl like all the others. Her kisses . . . Then he went to his landlady and told her that he wished to keep the quarters. He was taking back the notice.

"Because," he said, laughing, "I can't let that rooster over there out of my sight. I have to guard him so he doesn't do anything wrong."

The widow Ebert looked at him in great astonishment and took note of his communication with a quiet shake of her head.

A stranger had entered into the beautiful happiness of the lovers who destroyed all confidences. Eva was shy and, it almost seemed to Philipp, cold. He himself was not able to erase the impression of that dark ravine and the gloomy, musty-scented night. And he almost thought with secret

hatred that this woman and his Eva were the same. He hated them both. One day, when he entered the little store at an unusual hour, he met a stranger busily engaged in business with Eva. It was the cheeky young fellow from that unlucky day. He acted very familiar, as if he were a permanent guest here, and looked at Philip presumptuously from above. Eva had become very embarrassed when Philip, with a pale face, made a small purchase and left immediately. The other one stayed behind with a sneeringly superior mien, leaning against the wall and puffing the smoke of his cigarette at Philipp.

So she had another one! Oh, Philipp could have guessed that right away. So that's where the big change came from. Something brewing hit him against the ribs. Like surf. Was that his heart? That night he was attacked by a paralysis of the mind. He sat at the open window until morning, watching the rooster with the green wings beating toward the red sun, hearing it crow in loud delight. When the sun had slowly climbed over the tower into the streets, Philip went to sleep. He awoke toward evening, dressed quickly, and ran to Eva,

The girl was frightened by his pallor and by the fire in his eyes. He did not greet her and shouted out in a rasping gasp:

"That's the same guy who looked at you like that on the trip that time. He's your lover."

"But Philip!"

"Yes, I saw it, didn't I? He's like at home here, and he's got the manner of a gentleman. He has often been here! You are friendly with him."

"My God, he is a strong smoker. I make much on him."

"It's not that, my good one. But thou art un-burned in uncleanness. You are possessed by the spirit of the cock."

And as she drew back from him in horror, he cried out, "See how I have struck you."

Then he dashed away with a gibbering laugh. He ran through the streets, ruthlessly pushing people aside. The night came quite cool and calm, approaching the busy main streets of the city from the suburbs. It became quieter and the houses called their people to them. Philip came home dull and tired. He stepped to the window, and his tired eyes searched for the weathercock. But in that one moment all his strength shot hotly into his head and limbs. He looked again. What? ... The tower knob was empty. The weathercock was gone and it seemed to the student as if it floated like a

black dot high above the tower in the night. He put his hands over his eyes once more: the rooster was gone and fluttering somewhere in the air.

Philip was already standing in the alley. It was as if a large black bird glided silently above him. As if it wanted to show him the way. The way to where? He stood. There it was again above him; and on the house wall opposite the glaring light was a shadow like large, shadowy wings passing by. Now Philip followed the direction of the flight. He went into the remote suburban neighborhood where Eva's store was. Here it was quite dark and deserted. A bored watchman stood on the corner under a dim lantern. And at last . . . Eva's house. The two lighted windows on the second floor belonged to her apartment. Light so late? He looked up straining to see. It was as if shadows were moving behind the bright curtains. A back and forth. A scurrying and catching . . . Two shadows . . . like a love game in the convoluted room. One of the shadows . . . were they really two shadows? . . . Yes! . . . One of the shadows was a man. Then Philip heard a bright, piercing, mischievous crowing. And . . . ... and ... up in the gutter sat the tin weathercock. It ducked in delight, flapped his wings, and crowed his victory into the night.

Philip rushed to the front gate and tore at the bell with all his might. But he only heard the crunch of the rusty wire, no other sound. The bell wires must have been broken. So he banged his fists against the door. The front gate pushed him back; and no one opened it. The watchman slowly shuttled over and rebuked him for the noise.

Then the student shouted, "Look at the weathercock from the tower up there in the gutter."

"I don't see anything!"

Really, the rooster was gone. Philip gave the watchman a shove and ran away. When he came to the town hall, a shadow flew over his head, climbed up and - there sat the weathercock again on top of its knob. Then suddenly the glow of his consternation and anger left Philip and an icy resolve entered his soul. He now saw things beneath him quite clearly and with superiority. The weathercock had to be rendered harmless first and foremost.

With stiff, dignified steps he passed the police station, as if he merely wanted to use the passage through the town hall. In the courtyard he turned right. This was the way up to the archives, where he had once rummaged through the documents. He knew every nook and cranny here. The corridors

were lined with round bay windows that looked down on the courtyard and gave back every soft sound with the irritability of the night. The slurping of the steps was like the rushing of a waterfall in the ear of the student.

Now the door that led to the tower. It was barred. Philip climbed onto the ledge of the window, bent far forward, and let himself fall against the iron support of the lightning rod. Then he climbed up the roof by it, on hands and feet over the smooth slates to the ridge, the cornices of the tower, its projecting ornaments and then up to the dome. He thought he would slide and fall, but he overcame its slippery curvature and then . . . the pointed spike to the cock . . . Already he reached out his right hand for the tinny beast, when a spasm tore his left from the thin rod and hurled him down. The curvature of the dome threw him far out into the air; he hit his head on the edge of the roof and fell into a corner of the courtyard between an old fire engine and a dust cart.

Two hours later, the sun rose; the student's mangled body was found in the ugly corner of the ancient courtyard. Up high above the city, the weathercock stood in the blue, silky pale air like a shining, green gleaming jewel. -

The Treasure Diggers

The devil used to stop at the Antoni Chapel every night.

He had an acquaintance in the city that he had to visit. On his way back, he flew over the narrow valley with the quiet, tired brook. The cross of the chapel shimmered up to him in the moonlight or its white walls shone through the night.

Then he sat on the narrow altar board, pressed the saint's image against the wall with his broad, bristly back and bobbed his tail merrily.

Sometimes he stretched his upper body forward so that it became long and narrow like a tube. Like a tubular worm, he snaked it out of the narrow chapel door, through the entire valley to the stone enclosed source of the stream.

And while still sitting on the altar, he blew into the water with the mouth end of the long tube.

The green water sprite knew the sign. He crawled out of the spring hole and waddled on his wet toad feet toward the chapel. In the same measure, the tubeworm retreated beside him.

These were the most pleasant hours for the devil. It was too dry for the water sprite in the country. He could not quite stand it. The longer he stayed outside, the more his green googly eyes popped out of his head and the more he puffed out his whitish toad belly.

The devil laughed with delight at this.

The water sprite noticed this, and it annoyed him. But he did not want to spoil it with his powerful friend. So he held back.

But when he was back in the spring, he spewed all his anger and bile into the water. In the morning, the people in the city were surprised that the water from the water pipe was again so cloudy and greenish and full of threads.

And the number of typhoid cases increased rapidly.

* *
*

Over the ridge came three peasants. Borromeo led the way with a lantern. Vaclav and Jan groped behind him.

The dry leaves rustled under their feet. Their footsteps scraped the ground like stiff brushes over velvet curtains. It was so dark that one could not see their hand before their eyes.

If Borromeo had not gone ahead with the lantern, all three of them might have fallen into the old quarry.

From the half-blind panes of the lantern a fretful yellow light squeezed and ran thickly onto the brown layer of leaves. Sometimes a sudden reflection climbed up a tree at lightning speed in a zigzag.

At any moment a heavy, black trunk would leap out of the darkness toward the three with a vicious, sneaky swiftness, as if it wished and expected them to butt heads against it.

But the three walked slowly and cautiously . . . Step by step....

Borromeo with the lantern ahead, Vaclav and Jan with shovel and pickaxe behind.

Several times they slid down the slope on the slippery layer of leaves.

At the bottom of Antoni’s Fount Vaclav and Jan threw down their tools and groaned. Borromeo put the lantern on the stone well casing.

Then all three ran their sleeves over their foreheads.

They looked around. So here it was. Borromeo was the leader:

"Thirteen steps forward and seven steps to the left, eleven steps backward and three steps to the right," he mumbled.

The other two nodded their heads.

"Well . . ." said the Borromeo, spitting into his hands.

Then he took the lantern and strode out . . . one . . . two . . . three . . . The others stayed by his side and counted along.

Seven steps to the left.

Eleven steps backward.

Three steps to the right.

There they were again four steps in front of the fountain. So that was the place.

But there was supposed to be a big stone, the handyman said. And there stood only a dense nettle bush.

The three stared at each other. They thought. How was that possible? In the brown wrinkles of their faces was a measureless puzzlement.

Finally Jan slowly and hesitantly asked if someone could have rolled away the stone and then the nettles. . .

Bah. ... possible . . . really possible . . .

Could it be.

Yes...

"It's been two hundred years," says Borromeo. And Vaclav grabs the

spade and mows down the thistles so that the heads fly. A thick, bristly bud smacks against the glass of the lantern with a dull crash, like a big beetle.

No one turns his head.

Then something occurs to Borromeo . . . To say the Lord's Prayer", down there by St. Antoni's in the chapel ... a friendly intercession can't hurt when digging for treasure.

For the evil enemy is guileful and mischievous. He often moves the treasure a hundred meters underground at the last moment.

And Antoni is such a good saint. - The devil had hit the water sprite over the back with his tail tuft when he saw the three of them coming over the mountain.

"You ... look there!"

"Ah - so what," opined the water sprite.

"So . . . Treasure diggers."

"And at my place. They're getting all the earthworms in a tizzy again. If they leave me, I'll be deprived of my best entertainment."

"Shh, they're coming here."

"Well now . . . what is it now?"

The water sprite made himself all small and slippery like a bug and hid behind the frame of the saint's picture.

The devil only laughed, flicked his tail through the air so that for an instant a fiery S stood in the darkness, and sat still.

The three peasants knelt down before the iron chapel grille and clasped their hands. Borromeo had hung the lantern on one of the iron spikes.

The light was afraid of the darkness in the chapel and did not want to enter. It agonized around the bars and the stone tiles of the floor.

Through the darkness there was a faint flicker from the altar. Like two wild, glowing eyes.

Borromeo thought it was a reflection from the halo of Antoni.

The three prayed fervently for a good success.

From time to time they lifted their eyes to the darkness, to where they knew the image of the saint was.

And the devil sat on the altar and laughed.

Then they set to work again.

Vaclav loosened the earth, and Jan threw it out of the hole with the shovel. Borromeo stood by and soon relieved one, soon the other.

The water sprite had crawled out from behind the frame again and

puffed out his thick, white toad belly with a snort.

"Is there anything in the ground at all?" he asked the Devil.

"Not a trace!"

"Crazy asses!"

Midnight had long since passed, and the three were already deep in the earth. But they waited in vain for the muffled sound that would have told them they had finally hit the wooden box.

"One meter deep, he said," Borromeo kept muttering to himself.

But it was already more than a meter!

"Hm!"

He said, spitting into his hands, and began counting steps once more from the well. He came to the pit again.

Vaclav and Jan were staring at him.

He just nodded.

Then the two continued digging.

Under the door of the chapel the devil and the water sprite stood and watched.

The water sprite kept grumbling about the digging. And the more he was annoyed, the more the devil was pleased.

He giggled happily to himself.

All at once he gave the water sprite a jab in the ribs.

"You, I can think of some fun!"

"What?"

"Well, just you wait! You'll see."

The devil pulled out the wrinkled, folded bat wings from the skin pockets at his sides.

"Where are you going?"

"I'll be right back . . . wait for me."

He gave himself a push-off and shot up bolt upright.

A gust of wind swept through the trees, and the scrawny leaves rustled against the branches.

At the top he unfolded his broad wings and turned once in a circle. He immediately found his way around. Down there lay the village, and there a little way off was Jan's hut . . .

In the parlor the air was musty and thick. The clock cut the time into very small pieces with heavy and even pendulum strokes. From time to time, something creaked in the gears, and then the pendulum shook a little.

The marriage bed stood against the wall where the crucifix hung. Under the crucified one, in a red glass held by an iron ring in the wall, burned the eternal light. The farmer's wife lay in the thick, hard, red and white striped cushions, the blanket pulled up to her mouth. One of the cushions had slipped halfway over the edge of the bed, and the peasant woman held it clutched with both arms, like the body of a man.

Her mouth was open, and her breathing was deep and long. A bit of fuzz on the bedspread moved back and forth in her snoring.

The devil came in noiselessly through the window. The glass panes opened in front of him and closed behind him like sheets of clear water, light, soft and friendly. Only the edges pulled up a little on his figure, with a quiet clinging, as the water pulls up on the edge of the drinking glass.

He stepped to the foot of the bed.

The eternal light in front of the crucifix began to flicker restlessly.

The farmer's wife stopped snoring and sucked the air through her nose, whistling. Then the devil pulled his tail under his arm and touched the farmer's wife's forehead with the tassel.

Annushka started up . . . the eternal light above her hissed shrilly through the darkness. She looked into the bed next to her. . Empty. Where was her husband? He had lain down beside her that evening, after all. But he had been so strange. Not at all in the mood for tenderness. He had lain down on the other side and fallen asleep. Or was he just pretending? . . . Had he only waited until she was asleep - and then gone to someone else. . . . .

Annushka got out of bed with both feet. There she sat, thinking. The quick movement had pushed her nightgown up over her knees.

The devil stood at the foot of the bed and, grinning in amusement, looked at her coarse, bare, rough, skinned legs. She thought about it... Such wickedness. Annushka was very much in love. And now her husband was cheating on her. They had been married only recently, and she still had the wild fire of a young woman, the hot heat of never-satisfied lust ... With whom was the man cheating on her? She hadn't noticed anything. . . Or was there no wench behind it after all . . . ? Where, where could he be . . . ? Did it perhaps have anything to do with what he was always secretly whispering about with Vaclav and Borromeo these last few days...?? A secret he did not want her to know .... . . ? But what could it be? Then she remembered, she had once heard something about Antoni’s Fount . . . and there had been talk

of night time . . .

Dear God!

If he was at Antoni’s Fount now ... At night . .... just past the quarry ... that was really scary. Weleba once saw will-o'-the-wisps dancing around the chapel in the evening.

She didn't know herself why she was suddenly so terribly frightened. He was a man after all. And then he had certainly not gone there alone, but with Borromeo and Vaclav. And yet, she had no peace, she had to make sure that nothing happened to him. Even if he scolded her and beat her... she could no longer stand it here in the lonely, desolate bed.

With a jerk, she stood upright. A soft chill shivered up at her from the floor. She reached for her petticoat and, softly murmuring an Our Father, she began to dress....

Vaclav and Jan were already up to their shoulders in the ground at Antoni’s Fount. Borromeo stood above and watched, spitting from time to time on the pile of earth next to the pit.

All three were furious.

"Such a dog, such a rascal, such a lout," they inwardly scolded the craftsman. And yet they were firmly convinced that there was a treasure. He had described it too precisely. But he had obviously not told them one last, most important thing, something that actually showed where the treasure was. Otherwise one always dug in the wrong spot. Oh, Borromeo knew this only too well, he had already had a lot to do with such things. His grandfather had told him about it. From him he had heard the strangest things. Until they brought him to the city and locked him up because one of his love potions had brought death to the maid of the castle instead of the heartfelt affection of young Bartonek.

Borromeo was excellently instructed in such matters. Yes. ... they could not find the treasure if they did not know the last part. And that was exactly what the handyman had not told them.

Vaclav and Jan were standing in the pit up to their shoulders. The damp loamy soil had smeared their clothes all over.

They dug deeper and deeper with a blind rage, an insane excitement. And a consuming resentment was in them, a fiery greed and a bitter disappointment.

They had almost touched the gold with their hands, seen it with their physical eyes. And now the treasure was . . . God knows where. Everyone

had already thought about what they would do with the money.

Jan wanted to buy the fields from Prochaska and build a new house with green doors and windows and a front garden where red and blue balls would shine on the rose bushes.

Vaclav wanted to sell his house and move to Turas, where he would take over the inn from his father-in-law. He would keep all Sundays free for his friends and get drunk.

Borromeo smiled at his friends. He wanted to move to the city, live in a small house on the Krona and become a city lord. He wanted to sit in the city park every day and let the sun shine on him and laze around. That was so much to his liking.

"If only the cursed digging was over," Vaclav grumbled from the pit.

Shh," Borromeo said, "don't swear, or the treasure will go a hundred meters deeper into the ground. Vaclav growled and continued to stab, sighing.

Finally, exhausted, they lowered their hands. It was no longer possible. They felt the fatigue, the intemperate rage, the terrible disappointment physically like heavy weights inside them.

Silently Vaclav and Jan climbed out of the hole.

They stood in a circle and stared with bloodshot eyes into the darkness below.

It would soon be morning.

The second candle in the lantern was dying. One of its smoke trails passed through the air hole above. From the thrown up mound of earth it tried in vain to see into the pit through the smoky, splashed with damp earth panes....

In front of the water sprite winking with sleepy eyes at Antoni’s chapel, the devil clapped down from the air ... like a heavy bird. The water sprite cringed a little.

The devil laughed, carefully folded the bat wings back together and tucked them into the skin pockets in his sides.

. "Now, watch," he said, "this is going to be a lot of fun."

"What only?"

"You'll see!"

Silently, the devil walked toward the peasants. He stepped behind Borromeo put his arms around his neck and whispered something to him.

Borromeo raised his shaggy head.

"Yes . . ." he said slowly and stretched, "just now it occurred to me . . . grandfather told me. I just couldn't remember. If the treasure doesn't want to show itself at all ... so... ...all you need is the blood of a man's heart.....”

Vaclav and Jan looked up and stared at each other. Borromeo's eyes grew so big that the whites were visible. At that moment, everyone felt the question, "Who is it?" and their hands searched for the knives in their pockets.

Borromeo completed: “to pour on the earth . . ."

A moment of trembling silence. Everyone felt that now it was decided according to the most secret sympathies of the soul. An unspoken understanding had to take place between the two who would pounce on the third.

Then Borromeo said; "Someone is coming over the mountain."

Right - there was a light coming through the forest. High up on the down-slope. It disappeared, emerged, submerged in a swaying ripple. It came lower and closer . . . Then they saw it already between the trees. The leaves began to rustle under the foot of the coming one. . . Closer and closer. Quite clearly the dragging of feet in the scrawny leaves...

And there . . .

"Annushka!" said Jan tonelessly, and his hands sank dead down his body. He wanted to say something else . . . scream . . . But the devil stood behind him and squeezed his throat.... He could not utter a sound.

"What is it?" said Annushka fearfully, "what is it? What is the pit for? I saw your light from the top of the mountain. . . And there . . . But ..."

She looks around ... No one answers. Jan is white as a corpse. She steps to the edge of the pit, lifts the lantern and peers in.

"So deep . . . What is it?"

Behind her, Borromeo has grabbed the pickaxe and is swinging it high through the air.

It suddenly occurred to Annushka.

"Jesus Maria . . . a treasure trench. . . Aah!" she roars, sinks to her knees and falls forward into the pit.

Borromeo follows her, stabs her blindly with the pickaxe and jumps on her as if he wanted to kick her into the ground.

Annushka stops screaming and only gurgles . . . then that also stops.

Vaclav and Jan stand at the edge of the pit, as if petrified. They do not move a limb.

Borromeo, however, kneels down on Annushka and tears open her jacket and the blouse from her chest. Then he pulls the knife out of the sack, opens it and plunges the blade into the woman. A stream of blood rushes over the soft, trembling flesh of the chest, trickles down the side, and slowly drips onto the black earth, where it seeps away.

Borromeo stands up and wipes his forehead. He has become hot. Then he slowly pulls himself out of the pit. His arms and legs tremble a little.

But when Jan sees Borromeo's head coming out, he cries out, runs his hands through his hair and runs away into the forest.

For a long time the two others hear his roar. They look at each other. Borromeo laughs stupidly and says, "Now we'll find the treasure for sure."

Once again he shines his lantern into the hole. There lies Annushka inside, squashed together, trampled, her head split in two, her face hacked to a pulp by the stabs of the pickaxe.

"Hm! Sakra!" says Borromeo.

There is nothing to be seen of the treasure. Nowhere does the gold shine as Borromeo had imagined.

It became even lighter. Nothing ... he could climb in again and turn the body over, perhaps the gold is under it. . but it has suddenly become so cold to him all at once. And over the ridge the sky turns gray.

Then he grabs the shovel and starts to fill in the hole. And Vaclav takes the pickaxe . . . and they work . . . like madmen.

Finally it's closed...

Then they go to the chapel.

The devil and the water sprite had a wonderful conversation.

The water sprite held his belly the whole time and snorted as if he wanted to burst.

Now the two are approaching the chapel.

The devil quickly jumps on the altar, and the water sprite stands in the darkest corner and turns his white belly to the wall, so that they will not see him shining in the darkness.

Borromeo and Vaclav kneel down.

"Saint Antoni!" says Borromeo.

"Pray for us!" answers Vaclav.

The devil sits on the altar and twists his tail merrily.

The gray above the mountain becomes brighter and brighter.

From the distance comes a wild, stray scream. That is Jan whose body

is bouncing from rock to rock in the quarry.

About Joe Bandel

Joe Bandel lives in North Central Minnesota with his dog Valentine. He enjoys nature, hiking, spiritual and metaphysical studies, shamanism, druidry and translating German dark fantasy and horor stories into English.

His translation projects include stories by:
Hanns Heinz Ewers
Karl Hans Strobl
Stanislaw Przybyszewski

A book of poems by Mia Holm

Perhaps the biggest project is the translation of the world's first illustrated fantasy magazine first published in 1919 in the German language, **Der Orchideengarten**. This includes the first English translations of these stories by various authors along with the original artwork. This project is ongoing.

His work includes limited editions by Side Real Press of England to include **The Hanns Heinz Ewers Brevier**; **Alraune;** and the to be published **Vampire**. It also includes the Side Real Press collector edition of **Kokain** magazine.

[1] “Boring!”

[2] Experimentation, demonstration and study

[3] To give plenary power

[4] “of the dead nothing but good is to be said.”

[5] Dogs of God