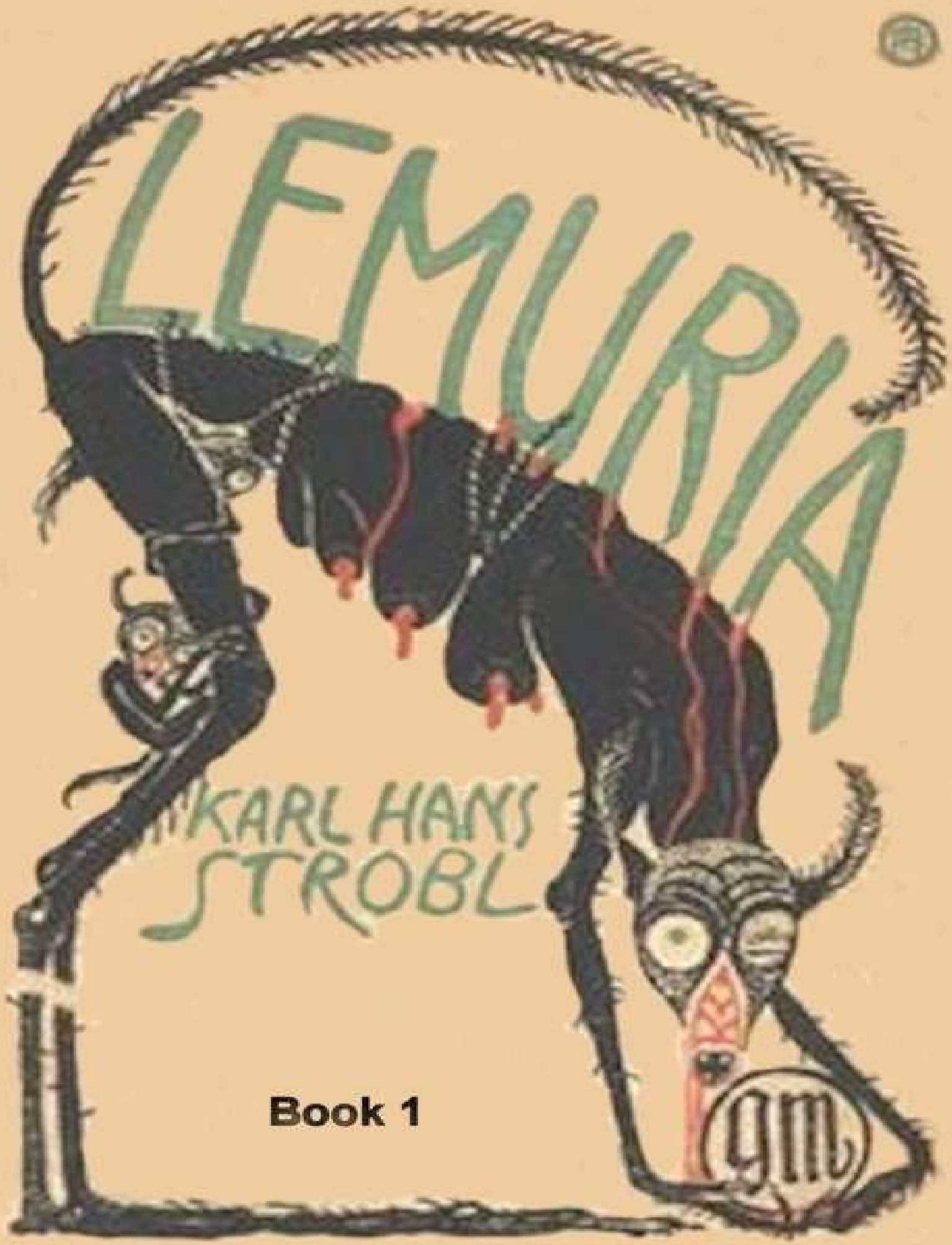




LEMURIA

KARL HANS
STROBL

Book 1



Lemuria Book 1

By

Joe E. Bandel

Karl Hans Strobl

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First Edition

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This book is dedicated to my children and step-children., Lyssa, Crystal, Whitney, Dylan, Sarah and Jason. Dreams can come true. Even if it is four pages at a time. Don't ever give up!

Translated by Joe E. Bandel 2014

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Am Kreuzwey (1900)

Der Hexenrichter (1900)

Der Kopf (1899)

Die Repulsion des Willens (1905)

Mein Abenteuer mit Jonas Barg (1905)

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Kariganeitob

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 non-fiction. In 1919 he edited the world's first fantasy magazine, **Der Orchideen Garten**. 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.

-Joe Bandel

24 April 2014

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 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 Nagybecse. The rest of us were feverish with impatient 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 the 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

The Mermaid

Tall Peters came running back into the village like a man possessed. Even from a distance he was waving his long arms in the air. Yes, then the pastor's wife randomly threw a glance out the kitchen window. When she saw how tall Peters came running with his legs flying and waving his hands the frying pan fell out of her hands in terror.

The pastor's wife was in another condition. Terror went shooting through her limbs and she sank down onto the wooden crate by the stove deathly pale. With one hand she held her aching body, with the other she felt along the wall trembling convulsively. Her trembling fingers threw the salt shaker from the nail so that it fell down and shattered. The white salt mixed with the gray dust in front of the stove. Her eyes were staring wide open and fear poured into the emptiness.

Then tall Peters ran through the village bellowing something as long legs flew behind him and his arms waved like a windmill. He was yelling at the top of his lungs. The women peered after Peters from out of all the doors. But he didn't stop until he had ran through all the streets. Then he stood in the middle of the village square, pale and panting from the exertion. Curious, impatient women crowded around him. What was it? Yes. What was it? Yes what?

The fishermen have caught a mermaid down on the beach. She's lying there in the sand. She was trying to escape and the waves have washed her ashore. She has a fish tail and green blood and she's lying down there. Everyone should come and see. Then the women gathered their bonnets and scarves together and in a few moments the entire procession was running out of the village. Hobbling along behind them as quickly as her old feet could carry her came the short weathered, over one hundred years old, grandmother of Peters. She was leading her smallest grandson by the hand because he still couldn't run very well and kept on falling down.

The wind blew the skirts and scarves of the women so that they fluttered like loose sails behind them.

From a high dune they could already see the dark crowd of fishermen down below them. They were standing together in a knot and looking at something in their midst.

Then the women parted the circle of men that were standing around and the miracle of the sea lay there before them.

Half woman, half fish . . . a small, pale face with blue, fear filled eyes that wandered from one to the other of them in deathly terror. Heavy, moist blonde hair fell around her shoulders. And the trembling young, budding breasts lifted and fell in a storm of small dancing water droplets.

But where the legs began with human children, there was a tender, rosy red and green scale. And the gleaming scales became smaller and thicker, until they slid together and tightly covered the barrel shaped lower body around to the back where they ended in a fish fin. Diagonally above the tail, but right beneath the fin was a deep and hideously gaping wound. Only a thin band of flesh still held the fin to the body. Large, heavy drops of green blood slowly oozed and trickled from out of it. All around her the sand had been colored green.

A knife sharp coral reef must have wounded the helpless mermaid and the waves washed her onto the beach.

The fishermen, women and children stood in a circle and looked at the miracle with dull eyes.

Then the spell was slowly broken. What did it mean? What should they do with her?

Someone proposed that they should drag her up into the village with ropes. No, not into the village, the women clamored . . .

Let's ask the pastor! Someone get the pastor! And Peters with his long legs was sent running to get the pastor. The others continued to shout at each other, a confusion of questions. But no one had any answers.

The blue, tired, and deathly afraid eyes wandered from one to the other. Finally they settled upon Jens.

Flaxen haired, broad shouldered Jens had pressed up to the front. He asked nothing; he answered nothing. He just stared fixedly and dumbly at the mermaid at his feet.

Her wandering eyes had found a calm place to rest and with a trembling look embraced his figure. Then her searching eyes met his . . . and bashfully and shyly her small, pale hands reached up to her heavy, moist mantle of hair and covered her tender, young breasts.

The two of them didn't hear the confusion of voices and questions around them. Wealthy Klaus proposed to simply kill the devil thing and throw it back into the water. The women were all in agreement with that and the men wanted to run back to their boats and grab their oars.

Then Jens broke his silence. This woman was not to be killed, he declared with his deep voice. He would take her and heal her, and when she was healthy he would put her back into the water.

“But Jens!”—screamed his mother from the crowd.

And Jens was indifferent to what all the others said.

“You are not permitted to torture the animals. That is what the pastor said. So you must also help those that are only half human.”

The women raised a great fuss over it and Jens mother started to cry.

Jens thought that the pastor would agree with him.

Here comes the pastor, several screamed, and the pastor stepped into the circle with them.

He was very agitated and his legs shook. His hands trembled and the sweat of fear stood out on his forehead. At home his wife was writhing in pain.

“What is it?”

“Jens! Jens,” they all screamed.

Jens explained to the pastor what he intended to do.

But the pastor pressed his hand against his forehead, as if to come to his senses. Then he began to speak, hastily and brokenly.

What Jens intended, could not be tolerated within his congregation. All compassion and all charity went only to God’s creatures. But this creature here was without a doubt a creature of the devil, and it would be evil to take such a thing into the village and do such devil’s work.

“Kill it, kill it,” cried Klaus and a few others with him. But the pastor also thought that killing it was not right. They should just let it lie there in peace; it was a mixture from hell, and it would disappear again like a fish, when the tide came and carried it out into the sea again.

But now everyone should go about their work and leave the mermaid in peace.

Then the pastor pressed back through the circle of people and hurried with long strides back to his house. Slowly the people disbursed.

Only Jens remained behind. With bowed head he looked down at the woman. Her blue eyes had become more calm and quiet. There was gratitude and trust in them. She knew that he had spoken up for her.

Then a rough fist shook Jens shoulder.

“Come.”

His father stood next to him. But Jens stubbornly shook his head. He wanted to stay there. But his father shook him harder. A red rage climbed into his face. He threatened . . . then Jens grabbed the fist on his shoulder with his iron fingers so hard, that the joints creaked.

Both men stared into each other’s faces. But . . . Jens saw his mother up above on the dunes. Her skirt and scarf fluttered and she rang her hands in misery.

Then Jens let go of his father's hand and went back up to the village

...

The clouds scurried across the narrow crescent moon. The sea surged. Its loud sounds reached to the village. Everything there had long since become dark. Only in the pastor's house, behind red curtains, was there a light. A dull red glow lay upon the small front yard. A figure sneaked past the picket fence—Jens.

He stopped for a moment and looked up at the lit window. He knew that up there a woman was struggling with death. He bit his teeth together and muttered an angry curse.

Then he was beyond the village and down the dunes. On the white sand lay a dark spot . . .

The mermaid heard footsteps. She tiredly raised her head. And then Jens kneeled down beside her and spoke to her with gentle, kind and compassionate words. He knew that she didn't understand him. But it would sound good to her.

She hid her feverish hands in the brown fists of the boy.

Then she began to sing, softly and sadly, words in a strange language. Like thick gray fog over secluded rocky islands—the melody was so hollow and heavy—and so infinitely sad.

Jens listened . . . and he didn't notice how the tears were rolling down his face.

Then he came to his senses. He had brought some food, bread and fish, and he offered her some.

But she just shook her head. And then she sang some more. Jens knelt beside her and held her hands in his, until the stars went out and the

morning wind began.

Then he got up and looked at her.

“I will come again.”

And she understood the strange words and the promise, and her gaze was mild and peaceful, as he climbed up the dunes.

There was a great unrest over the entire village, as the people went with shy, quiet steps past the house of the pastor and the window draped with red curtains where it was so deathly quiet. Several had heard broken screams and strangled whimpering, as if someone was biting into a pillow. Around noon the pastor stood motionless in the garden behind the house and stared down at the distant roiling sea, with a long pipe in his hands. And then suddenly, like a madman, he shattered the glass ball of a lawn ornament with the head of his pipe so that it shattered in all directions and ran back into the house. There was something eerie in the air.

There was an early morning noise in Jen's house. His father had learned from the night watchman that Jens had been down at the beach. It came to a dispute and Jens raised his hand against his father and flung him against the stove so that his head received a considerable lump. But finally the old man overwhelmed Jens, carried him upstairs like a child and locked him in his room.

In the village there was a wild muttering against the poor, abandoned mermaid lying down there on the beach. Several young fellows had been down there and reported that she was lying there motionless in the sand, with closed eyes. It was only by her slight breathing that they knew she was still alive. They had wanted to tease and throw sand at her, but the lust to do that had left them when they had seen her pale, dying face.

But the elders held the mermaid responsible for the disruption in the village that day. Wealthy Klaus thought it would have been better if they had immediately killed the thing of the devil yesterday.

Then, late that evening the people discovered that the pastor's wife had brought a dead child into the world. The baby had a malformed water head and its crippled feet had a reddish and green metallic shimmer like fish scales. It was hopeless, the pastor's wife was going to die.

Then a great rage seized the people and they wanted to go down to the beach immediately and kill the mermaid, whom they thought had caused all this. But the night was growing dark, and the wind that blew from the sea was so icy cold that they turned back. Tomorrow . . . in daylight . . . at dawn.

Then it became completely dark and not a light was burning in the entire village—only the sad flickering behind the red curtains showed someone was still awake in the pastor's house—when Jens climbed out his bedroom window.



Like a cat, silently and carefully.—His broad shoulders barely fit through the narrow window frame. But he succeeded. Jens pushed himself through—and then jumped down to the soft lawn in front of the house. His knees buckled from the force of the fall, but he straightened back up. As he ran past the red curtained window of the pastor’s house, he balled his fists and growled a wild curse between his teeth.

And the mermaid knew that he would come. She lifted herself up on her arms and reached out her face to him. And Jens kissed the pale lips and the eyes, sunk deep into their holes.

Then she sang once more. The melody swam like fog over a rocky reef—then the veil of fog parted and her song became clear and golden. Sunshine lay over the sea and the waves became calmer and quieter and ebbed . . . and she softly fell asleep.

The woman had taken Jens hand and placed it on her breast. His hand moved through the heavy mantle of hair and then his heavy, work callused hand tenderly and softly lay upon the trembling breast of the woman.

And Jens felt how the life in her heart became fainter and fainter with every beat, then one last wild heartbeat, a convulsive grip on his arm and the woman fell back.

Jens sat and stared at the sunrise.

His eyes were dry. He had not shed one tear for his deep pain. And yet this pain was so easy and free. Only something troubled him. He didn’t know at first what it was. But then it came to him. He had heard what they had promised to do downstairs. They were going to come and kill her.

But they would not find her . . .

He got up with a powerful effort and took the corpse into his arms. His gaze burned solidly on her small, starring face; the severed fin dangled

down from his right arm and swung with every step he took.

That is how he walked out into the sea. With confident leaps he went from stone to stone and from the last large boulder he flung the corpse out into the sea with a mighty heave.

A splash and gurgle—and the tide carried the body away . . .

When Jens arrived back on the beach he heard the voices of the men from the village up above on the dunes. He realized immediately that several of them were drunk, recognized their hoarse, tinny laughter right away.

They shouldn't see him.

He laid down flat on the dunes in a low spot and let the procession go past. In the morning light he saw almost all of the men and boys of the village with sticks, clubs and oars. Several were drunk. At the front of the procession was Jens father with a white cloth around his banged up head. His fist was wrapped around an axe, and he was drunk as well. His eyes were bloodshot and his face was red.

Finally they were past. Jens raced up the dune. Halfway to the village he heard the angry, disappointed screams behind him.

Jens ran on. He wanted to reach the village and his room before the men came back. They shouldn't know what had happened that night.

As Jens passed the house of the pastor, he saw all the windows wide open.

He knew then, that the woman inside had died. And he ducked as he went along the houses and growled a wild curse between his teeth.

At A Crossroads

Three gray female giants sat at a crossroads. One had her feet propped up against a woodsman's cottage and was scratching the dirt out from between her toes with a dry bony finger.

“Hu—Hu” went the wind through the fir trees and shook them. The woodsman and his wife in the room inside convulsed in the paralyzing terror of a nightmare. A child in a crib whimpered softly.

The second made herself very small and cut at the wooden crucifix along the side of the road with a large, sharp knife. First she cut long splinters from the trunk and the crossbeam of the wooden gallows. She sang in a murmur, “Horum pitschor—rum . . . Rex Judae orum.”

Sliver by sliver, she cut away at the wood of the savior's nose until it was entirely gone and the white spot shone out of the dirty and weathered wood. Then she took the knife and scraped with the point of it on the navel of the wooden body. She turned it like a drill in her hands, faster, ever faster, until a large deep hole was bored into the body. Then she blew the remaining woodchips and dust out of the hole . . . her eyes glowed in the dark like those of a wolf.

The third sat upright. Her head towered high over the tops of the black fir trees. Something squirmed in her hand, a fat, plump farmer. Snap—she bit off his right foot. She crunched and chewed pleasantly . . .

“Oh, . . . I . . .,” whimpered the farmer. “Let . . .let me go.”

With a pleasant grin she looked at the fat morsel in her hand . . .

“I have a wife . . . my children are waiting for me at home.”

“So,” said the giantess . . .”My wife . . . I can't die . . .”

“So,” she grinned again. “There is your wife.”

And she set him down at the window in front of the room. It was light inside. He tried to stand up but collapsed.

The giantess reached into her mouth, “Here is your foot.”

Then the farmer stood on his toes. On the table inside was a lamp . . . The table was covered, two mugs of beer, two half full glasses, two plates full of bones. In the middle of the table was a dish with a half carved goose and another with seal meat. On a chair by the door was a riding coat and broad staple hat with two tassels in back. On a chair by the table was a jacket and lederhosen. On the floor in front of the curtain that hid the wide marriage bed was a pair of high boots and a pair of slippers. The farmer turned away from the window. He was pale as a corpse.

“My children,” he stammered.

The giantess led him to the pig sty. The farmer trembled as the giantess lifted off the wooden roof with a jerk so he could see inside. There was a fearful stink. A boy sat cowering in the corner, motionless . . . dirt on his face with bulging eyes. In the other corner a mother sow stood over a little girl and bored into the white flesh with her snout, tearing large chunks out of the tender body. The little body was still twitching and the warm blood made the piglets drunk as they pushed and rolled around in it. The two in the bed heard a scream, a piercing scream.

High above the black tree tops the giantess placed the fat morsel in her sturdy mouth with a pleasant grin. Snap—the hard bones broke—fat and blood ran out of the corners of her mouth.

At the crossroads the second had kindled a fire out of cow dung and dry fir branches under the feet of the crucifix. The naked feet smoldered in the hot flames of cow dung and dry fir branches. The entire body writhed and twisted in pain. The hollow of the body was stuffed with pages she had torn out of an old prayer book. When the tongues of flame reached up and the old yellow paper began to crackle and glow she jumped over the fire three times in glee. Then with a serious gesture she took the rosary from around the neck and threw bead after bead into the fire.

Then she hummed, "Ho—rum pi—tsho—rum—Rex Ju—dae—
orum."

Large heavy black drops of blood dripped from the cut off nose, over the pale face and down the distorted body into the fire where they sizzled and died.

At the woodsman's cottage the giantess had smashed the chimney flue with her big toe. The bricks crashed as they fell down into the fire place. With a scream the woodsman's wife came out of the bad dream. Everything was quiet. The clock had stopped.

"Hu—Hu," went the wind through the fir trees and shook them.

"Father," she shook the man. "Father, what is going on . . ."

She shook harder, still harder, despairing, "What is going on!"

She grabbed his hand . . . It was entirely cold . . . "Jesus Maria—Josef . . . make me a light!"

A sudden gust of wind tore the clouds apart. The moonlight fell in its purity into the black fir forest and onto the crossroads. Tatters of fog hovered over the tree tops. They slowly rose and swam in the glittering moonlight. In the distant village a hound began to bay noisily. In the woodsman's cottage a lamp was lit . . . Orum—orum— went the toads in the swamp.

The Witch Finder

Tap . . . tap . . . tap . . . tap . . . tap . . . came up the wooden stairs . . . It was Herr Doctor...uncertain, damned uncertain like his blade today that normally so firmly declared his decree. Tap . . . tap. Suddenly with a rattle an entire ring of keys rolled down the stairs . . . again . . . tap . . . but now downwards. Then a long stillness . . . finally once more, very soft and hesitant, as if ashamed and embarrassed of this nightly spectacle of feet on the steps. Tap . . . tap. There was a soft scraping like when someone touches a rough wall with a groping hand . . . step by step . . . wary . . . long . . . crash . . . a collision of steel and stone . . . It was the iron wall brace that held the pine torch to illuminate the stairs colliding against the stone head of the highly educated Herr Doctor, a celebrated member of the inquisition, known far and wide across the land as a distinguished and highly praised witch-finder. Tap . . . tap . . . At last, in front of the door to the bedchamber came a sigh of relief . . . The key grated in the lock and the rusty bolt slid back.

It was dark . . . pitch dark . . . in the bachelor's bedchamber. The Herr Doctor groped for a match . . . tried to make it stay lit . . . finally the tinder glowed and ignited as threads of sulfur, illumined a circle three paces wide around the unlit candle with a horrible reddish-yellow light.

The Herr Doctor had a red face—his velvet beret sat deeply back on the nape of his neck. The fur collar of his overcoat was turned inside out on the left side and on the right was in its accustomed place nestled around his shoulder . . . With wide set legs the doctor bent over in order to read the glowing lines of sulfur on the floor.

The lines of sulfur had already burned an ugly black hole in the snow white sand strewn floor. The doctor muttered something inaudible . . . then moaned in fear . . . there, sitting on his table in the middle of the room, was Satan. He had his tail casually pulled up and tucked under his left arm and looked good-naturedly at the doctor with large, round, fiery and glowing eyes.

“Ah,” thought the doctor . . . too damned much straw wine.

When His Majesty noticed that he had been seen he jumped down from the table . . . tap, went the human foot—click, went the horse hoof. With a jerk he pulled his tail down between his legs and up to the front holding it straight and stiff like a candle in front of him. He looked like a guard at the Prince’s castle that holds out his musket when his Highness walks past. The Herr Doctor was very flattered. He put his hand to his beret in a salute and waved in acknowledgement. Then His Majesty went out onto the balcony, came in again and pulled himself back up onto the table, but immediately hopped down again . . . tap—click . . . He had seen the disapproving look from the master of the house. He went to the flower painted chest in the corner behind the wardrobe and took out a wool blanket. He knew the customs of the house. He spread the wool blanket out on the table and only then allowed himself to sit comfortably back down on it.

A suppressed laugh came from out of the darkened corner where a wide bed stood. A virginal head with a rosy face peeped out from under the heavy covers and a disheveled flood of blond curls flowed out over the pillows. When two of the heavy curls moved, thousands of tiny sparks glowed and a slight crackling sounded in the stillness . . . Under the tangle of curls two eyes looked out, so alluring and mysterious, so fearfully tempting and promising. They were angel eyes—vampire eyes . . . The doctor felt very strange . . . it was as if those two eyes were glowing balls of fire that could warm and do good one moment and in the next hurt and set fire to anything flammable around them. He rubbed his temples. His head was pounding like a hammer.

He timidly neared the foot of the bed and attempted to lift the corner of the cover with the tips of his fingers. He had an irresistible urge to see the feet of this creature. He had the definite idea that these feet had to be small, warm and white. He wanted to take them between his large, red and clammy frog-like hands. His horned Majesty moved over the table and across to him with a mighty leap and gave him a sound slap on the hands.

“Ow,” said the doctor and rubbed the burned spots.

“Stand there,” said the dark one. “I will do that.”

With a sudden movement he pulled the covers down to her feet. The woman’s white body lay there in its naked beauty. It seemed to the doctor as if hot water had been throw over his head. At first he couldn’t see anything. Then he sat down on the edge of the bed and taking his hand as softly as possible moved it caressingly along the soft lines of her hip.

“Don’t tickle,” she said coyly. Yet her large eyes looked at him provocatively.

At that the doctor threw himself on top of her and covered her mouth with hot kisses . . . she wrapped her arms around him . . .the last thing he remembered before losing consciousness was that her arms did not seem to be the white, warm arms of a woman, but the hard sinewy, long hairy arms of a gorilla . . . then he sank into her . . .

He awoke with a mighty grip on his shoulder. At first he didn’t know where he was, yet the shaking continued. His black Majesty had seized him solidly and would not let him go until he entirely came to. The light had burned out, an unbearable stench filled the room . . . that of fat and burnt out wick. The moon had risen and shown bright as day into the room—the woman lay in the middle of the rumpled bed. Her face was blue, liked that of a strangled person—her tongue had swelled up and protruded far out from her throat—her body was convulsively distorted. The doctor was entirely confused.

“I want to show you something,” said His Majesty and poked with his black pointed finger at a spot between the breasts of the woman. The doctor got agitated and didn’t feel well.

“Pfui, the Devil!” he said.

“If you please,” said His Majesty.

The doctor became quiet. The dark one poked once more and with a bang the navel flew out of the belly of the woman, like the cork out of a pop gun. A long white cord was attached to the navel. It had notches or segments like those of a tapeworm. The navel fell to the floor and pulled the

white tapeworm with it. It coiled around on the floor as if it were alive. More and more of the white cord kept coming out, faster . . . in spirals . . . coiling about like snakes... the womb of the woman was inexhaustible. Already the entire floor was covered.



The doctor climbed up onto a chair. It shook beneath him. The thin white cord became thicker. It was already the size of an earthworm. The segments became deeper and limbs started poking out of each one . . . and still more kept gushing out of the hole where the navel used to be . . . Now the cord was as thick as a thumb. The segments swelled and became almost ball shaped. Then they began to cut away from each other and separate, began rolling around on the floor very much alive—some hopped into the air, others raced around with terrible speed between their siblings.

Then all of these round white balls assumed a new appearance. They grew feet with bird claws, a long, heavy sloping hind part and a head—a serious bearded head with a velvet beret—noisy little doctor heads. They were already the size of a fist and growing larger.

“Look at your children,” said Satan.

A red flame shot through the doctor’s head. He jumped down from his chair and trampled angrily among the quibbling masses . . .

“Ho, Ho!” he screamed, “Ho, Ho!”

He made wild leaps as he trampled millions of the squeaking and squealing young birds.

“What are you doing?” yelled Satan grimly.

He seized the doctor by one leg and whirled him around his head until he lost his breath. Then he put him down again. But as soon as the doctor came to his senses he once more jumped into the masses stomping and trampling them.

“Ho, Ho!” he screamed, “Ho, Ho!”

Then Satan became quiet and serious. He pulled some hairs from the tip of his pointed tail, tied them into a red silk cord and handed it to the doctor. The doctor’s eyes became glassy. He stood still and motionless. Then he made a noose out of the cord, placed it around his neck and pulled

and pulled—until he collapsed. The woman on the bed sat up and looked at him with glowing eyes.

In the distance sounded the horn of the night watch. The measured steps of troops rang under the window. The fountain in the market place murmured in the moonlight. The sandstone statue of the river god with his water spewing vase straightened up and looked over across at the doctor's window.

The next morning the Justice Commission needed his signature to justify yesterday's burning but the messenger could not get into the room. All kinds of gossip and speculation went through the people. They had heard strange things in the house. When the door was finally sprung—the doctor lay there dead on the floor with a red silk cord around his neck—on his hands was two large burn marks. In the rumpled bed swam a putrefied, stinking slop.

“Hm, hm,” said the Elder.

“Hm—hm”, said the remaining wise Gentlemen of the jury.

The Head

It was entirely dark in the room and all the curtains were shut. Not a glimmer of light came in from the street and it was entirely quiet. The stranger, my friend and I compulsively held our shaking hands together. There was a terrible fear around us . . . in us.

And then a gaunt, white glowing hand came up to us from out of the darkness and began to write on the table at which we were sitting, with the pencil that we had prepared for it, which was lying there. We could not see what the hand wrote, yet we felt it within ourselves at the same time, as if it were written in fiery letters right before our eyes.

Here is the story of this hand, and the man, to whom it once belonged, that was scribbled down on the paper there in the deep darkness of midnight by the white, glowing hand:

. . . — As I stepped upon the red cloth that covered the well-worn steps . . . there was something odd about my heart. It swung back and forth in my chest like a large pendulum. But the edge of the pendulum weight was as fine as a hair and sharp as a razor and when the pendulum touched the edge of my chest at the end of its swing, I felt a cutting pain there — and had trouble breathing — so that I wanted to gasp out loud. But I bit my teeth together so that no sound could come out, and I balled up my shackled fists so tightly that blood poured out from beneath my nails.

Then I was at the top. Everything was in order; they were all just waiting for me. — I calmly let my neck be shaved and then asked for permission to speak to the people one last time. They granted my request. I turned around and looked over the endless crowd that was pressed up close, head upon head, standing around the guillotine, all those stupid, dull, bestial faces, partly filled with crude curiosity, partly filled with lust: that mass of

people, that 14,000, that I scorned to even call human — the entire affair seemed so ridiculous to me that I had to laugh out loud.

Yet, then I saw the official looking face of my executioner filled with strict folds, scowling at me. It was downright impudent of me to not take this more seriously. Yet, I wanted to incite the good citizens a little more and quickly began my speech.

“Citizens,” I said, “citizens, I die for you and for freedom. You have misunderstood me; you have condemned me; but I love you. As proof of my love, listen to my testament. Everything that I possess is yours, here . . .”

I turned my back to them, and made a gesture that they could not misunderstand. . . There was a bellowing of outrage . . . I lay down quickly and with a sigh of relief placed my head in the opening . . . there was a rushing hiss . . . I felt an icy burn in my neck, then my head fell into the basket.

Then it seemed to me, as if I had stuck my head under water and my ears were being filled with it. The dark and confusing sounds of the outer world that pressed at me became a mere buzzing and humming in my temples. On the entire cross-section of my neck I had the feeling as if ether had evaporated there in large quantities.

I know that my head lay in the wicker basket — my body lay up above on the frame, and yet I had the feeling that the complete separation had not yet occurred. I felt my body lightly kicking and dropping down on the left side. Behind my back my manacled, balled up fists were lightly twitching; my fingers forcefully contracted, then stretched out and pulled back together. I also felt the blood streaming out of the stump of my neck and how this draining of blood made the motions become ever weaker. Also the ability to feel my body became more weak and faint, until the lower half below my severed neck was completely gone.

I had lost my body. In the complete darkness from my severed neck downwards I suddenly sensed red spots. The red spots were like sparks of fire in a dark stormy night. They flew around each other, flared up and

spread themselves out like drops of oil on the still surface of water . . . when the edges of the red spots touched each other I sensed electrical shocks in my eyelids, and the hair on the top of my head stood up. Then the red spots began to spin around themselves, faster, ever faster . . . countless numbers of burning fiery wheels, glowing fluidic slices of the sun . . . there was a rushing and a whirling of the discs with long tongues of fire licking out from behind them, and I had to close my eyes . . . I still felt the fiery red discs inside me . . . they stuck to me like grains of sand between my teeth and in every joint. Finally, the discs of flame faded away; their frantic spinning became slower, then one after the other became extinguished, and then for the second time it became very dark for me from my severed neck downwards. This time it was forever.

A sweet fatigue and lethargy came over me, a letting go; my eyes became heavy. I didn't open them anymore, and yet I could see everything around me. It was as if my eyelids were made out of glass and had become transparent. I saw everything as if through a milk-white veil, over which delicate, bloodshot veins branched outward. But I could see clearly and further than I could when I still had my body. My tongue had become lame and lay heavy and paralyzed in my mouth like a lump of clay.

But my sense of smell had refined itself one thousand times; I not only saw things; I smelled them, each different, with its own particular, personal odor.

There were three other heads in the woven wicker basket beneath the notch of the guillotine blade besides my own, two male and one female. Bits of makeup clung to the rosy colored cheeks on the woman's head; a golden arrow stuck in the powdered, coiffed hair, and dainty, diamond earrings were in the little ears. The heads of the two men lay with their faces turned downwards in a pool of dried blood. An old, badly healed wound showed across the temple of one; the hair of the other was already gray and sparse. The woman's head had its eyes shut and did not move. But I knew that she was watching me through the closed eyelids . . .

We lay like that for hours. I observed how the rays of the sun moved upwards across the frame of the guillotine. Then it was evening, and I

began to freeze. My nose was quite stiff and the cold of evaporation on the cross-section of my neck became uncomfortable.

Suddenly there was a coarse shouting. It came nearer, much nearer, and suddenly I felt how a rough, powerful fist seized my head firmly by the hair and pulled it out of the basket. Then I felt as if a strange pointed object was pressed into my neck — the tip of a lance. A crowd of drunken day laborers and soldiers were doing something with our heads. A powerful, lanky man with a red bloated face held the lance with my head on its tip in his hands and waved it high above the wildly excited and screaming crowd.

A knot of men and women were fighting over the division of the loot and pulled at the hair and ears of the woman's head. They rolled around wildly — entangled with each other — fighting with hands and feet — with teeth and nails.

Then the fight was at an end. They parted from each other. The crowd of disappointed ones that pressed around were clamoring and screaming at the ones that had managed to carry a piece of the booty away.

The head lay on the ground, defaced, defiled, with traces of fists everywhere, the ears were torn off by the violent jerks with which they had removed the earrings. The carefully coiffed hair was disheveled, the powdered braids of the dark blonde hair lay in the dust of the street. One nostril was cut as if by a sharp instrument; on the forehead was the imprint of a boot heel. The eyelids were half opened, the broken, glassy eyes stared straight out.

Finally the crowd moved forward. The four heads were stuck on long spikes. The anger of the people was mostly directed at the head of the man with the gray hair. The man must have been especially unpopular. I didn't know him. They spit on him and threw clumps of filth at him. Then a handful of street dirt hit him on the ear — what was that? Did he just move, softly, lightly; unnoticeably, perceptible only to me, or was it only a band of muscles?

Night fell. They requested that our heads be placed together on the tips of the iron fence surrounding the palace. I didn't know the palace,

either. Paris was large. Armed citizens lounged around the courtyard and set up a large bonfire. They sang bawdy songs and told jokes. There were bellows of laughter. The smell of grilled lamb wafted over to me. The fire gave off an aroma of costly rosewood. The savage horde had hauled the entire interior of the castle out into the courtyard and they were now burning it piece by piece. A graceful, elegantly upholstered sofa was brought up to the edge. It was now its turn — but they hesitated; they didn't throw the sofa into the fire. A young woman lunged forward, in a shirt that was open at the front and showed the full, solid shapes of her breasts. She spoke with lively hand movements to one of the men.

Was she asking them to give the costly piece to her? Did she suddenly desire to think of herself as a “duchess?”

The men still hesitated. The woman pointed at the fence, on whose pointed tips our heads were stuck and then again to the sofa. The men hesitated — finally she pushed them aside, tore a sword out of its sheath away from one of the armed men and with the help of the blade began to pull the little enameled nails from out of the wooden frame of the sofa, which held the heavily stretched silk in place. Then the men were helping. Then she was pointing again at our heads. One of the men came closer to the fence with hesitant steps. He searched, then climbed up the iron rods and took down the abused, disfigured head of the woman.

A terror shook the man, but he acted as if under a compulsion. It was as if the young woman over there by the fire, the woman in the red skirt and open fronted shirt ruled all those men around her with her wildly blazing predatory gaze. With a stiff arm he carried the head up to the fire by the hair. The woman seized the dead head with a wild, joy filled outcry. She twirled it around, swung it by the long hair twice, three times, over the flaming fire.

Then she crouched down and took the head in her lap. She stroked the cheeks a couple of times as if with a loving caress — the men settled down in a circle around her — and then she had one of the small enameled nails in one hand and gripped a hammer in the other, and with a short hammer blow she pounded the nail up to its head into the temple. Again a

short hammer blow, and again one of the nails disappeared into the woman's thick hair.

Then she started humming a song, a very fearful, joyous and strange folksong of ancient magic.

The bloody monsters sitting around looked over at her pale and terrified — their fearful eyes stared at her from out of their dark hollows. And she hammered and hammered, driving one nail after another into the head in time to the music of the strange old magical song that she was humming.

Suddenly a piercing scream pushed out of one of the men and he jumped up. His eyes were opened wide and protruding. Drool dribbled from his mouth. He threw his arms backwards and twisted his upper body as if from a terrible cramp and from out of his mouth came the shrill and piercing scream of an animal.

The young woman hammered and sang her song.

Then, a second man jumped up from the ground and howled as he waved his arms around him. He tore a burning brand from out of the fire and pushed it against his breast — again and again, until his clothing began to smolder and a thick stinking smoke spread out from him. The others sat stiff and pale and did not prevent him from doing it.

Then a third jumped up — and at the same time the others staggered to their feet as well. There was a deafening noise, a shrieking, a yelling, a screaming, a bellowing and howling; a tangle of moving limbs. Whoever fell . . . remained there to be trampled on by the others . . .

In this orgy of madness, the young woman sat there and hammered and sang.

Then she was finished, and she stuck the head studded with little enameled nails onto the tip of a bayonet and held it high over the howling, jumping masses. Someone tore the fire apart, the pieces of burning wood were put out and glowing sparks flew out into the dark corners of the courtyard where they were extinguished . . . it became dark — only a single

passionate scream and a wild noise, as if from a fearful scuffle — I knew, that all of these insane men, these wild beasts were now fighting over this single woman, with teeth and claws . . .

Everything became dark before my eyes.

My consciousness remained only long enough to see everything become gray around me . . . It was dawn . . . dark and indistinct, like the ending of day on a dreary winter afternoon. It rained on my head. A cold wind ruffled my hair. My flesh became soft and weak. Was this the beginning of decomposition?

Then something changed for me. My head was in another place, in a dark pit, but it was warm and peaceful there. Inside of me it was once again bright and clear. There were many other heads with me in the dark pit, heads and bodies. And I realized that the heads and bodies had found each other as best they could. And in this position they had again found their speech, but it was a quiet, inaudible, thought speech, in which they talked to one another.

I yearned for a body, like I once yearned after one to finally find relief from the unbearable cold on the cross-section of my neck which had now almost already become burning hot. But I yearned in vain. All the heads and bodies had found each other. There remained no body for my head. Yet finally, after a long wearisome search I found a body . . . at the very bottom, modestly in a corner . . . a body, that still had no head — a woman's body. Something in me strove against a connection with this body, but my desire, my longing, triumphed and I moved closer — moving by the power of my will — toward the headless trunk and I saw how it also strove toward my head — and then both severed surfaces touched each other . . . there was a slight shock, the feeling of a soft warmth. Then the most important thing happened, I had a body again.

But strangely . . . after the first feeling of well-being had passed, I sensed a huge difference in my other half . . . it was as if entirely different juices were being mixed together, juices that had nothing in common with each other.

The woman's body, which my head now sat upon, was slender and white and had the cool marble skin of an aristocrat, one who took wine and milk baths and squandered costly ointments and oils. On the side of the right breast, over the hip and across a portion of the belly was a strange design . . . a tattoo. And within it, thoroughly entwined among the blue points, hearts, anchor, and other arabesques were the letters "J" and "B". Who could this woman have been?

I sensed that I would know — soon! Something was forming from out of the vague darkness of the body beneath me. Minute by minute this image became clearer and more distinct. It was due to the painful penetration of the juices into my head, and suddenly it seemed me, as if I had two heads . . . and the second head — the woman's head, — was bloody, disfigured, distorted, — I saw it in front of me — completely covered with little enameled nails. It was the head that belonged to this body — at the same time in my own head, I felt perfectly the hundreds of pointed nails in my temples, the top of my head and in my brain; I wanted to scream out in pain. But everything around me sank into a red veil, one which moved back and forth as if pushed by a strong breeze.

Then I felt it, I was a woman, only my mind remained decidedly male. And then an image climbed out from the red veil . . . I saw my other self before me, in the lavish splendor of an extensively decorated room. I lay burrowed into the soft carpets . . . naked. In front of me, bending over me was a man with the hard coarse features of a man from the lowest levels of society, with the work hardened fists and the weather burned skin of a sailor. He was kneeling in front of me and poking strange designs into my soft flesh with the tip of a needle. The pain and stimulation aroused a strange sort of lust . . . I knew that the man was my lover.

Then a short, sharp pain from the needle caused my body to twitch and convulse together. I wrapped my white arms around the man's neck and pulled him down to me . . . kissed him and lay his hardened, callused hands upon my breasts, my shoulders and then kissed him again in a tumbling frenzy; embraced him and held him so tightly against me that he moaned breathlessly.

Then I seized his brown throat with my teeth, the throat, which I loved so much and which had so often aroused me, caused my tongue to stroke it with moist caresses . . . and then — and then I had to press my teeth into the firm brown flesh — I could not help it — I had to bite . . . and I bit . . . I bit . . . and I felt his moan become a gasp — I felt how the man in my arms was writhing and twitching spasmodically . . . but I didn't let go. His body became heavy — heavy . . . a warm stream flowed down over my body. His head sank down on top of it— I let him slide out of my arms — he fell back onto the soft white carpet with a dull thud . . . a thick stream of blood poured out of his bitten through throat. — Blood, blood was everywhere, on the soft, white polar bear fur — on me . . . everywhere.

I began to scream . . . the hoarse and raw sound forced itself out of my throat. The chamber maid rushed in, she must not have been very far away, perhaps in front of the door in the next room . . . had she been listening? . . . She remained rigid for a moment, without comprehension, and then threw herself over the body of the dead man without a word . . . without words and without tears . . . she buried her face in his blood covered chest — I could only see her clenching her fists.

Then I knew everything . . .

And then I saw another image . . .

Again, I saw my other self and it was the time when I was in the wooden cart, the same one that was going to the guillotine. Then I was standing above on the platform and raised my eyes to look at the sun for the last time. I slowly turned, then my gaze fell on a young woman who was standing very close to the front, who had pressed up into the first row . . . it was her . . . the lover of the man, the beloved of the one that was the victim of my lust . . . with a pale, twitching face, a red skirt, a revealing shirt and fluttering hair . . . her eyes glowed wildly, like those of a predator, moist as if from restrained grief and loss, as if about to experience a great joy. Then she raised her balled up fists in front of her face, and her mouth began to move . . . She wanted to speak, to reproach me, scold me, yet she could only cry — broken and incomprehensible . . . then I lay my head under the blade.

Then I knew everything.

I knew whose head it was that served as a sacrifice the night before in the glow of the bonfire, the terrible revenge from beyond the grave — I also knew who the young woman was, who in the same night in the dark palace courtyard had unleashed the raging beasts so that they raged, mangled and trampled . . . in my head was the pain of hundreds of needle sharp nail tips . . . I was bound to this body . . . to this body full of horrible memories and terrible pain, to this sinful, beautiful body, that has wandered through all the gates of hell.

This terrible split of my two beings is tearing me apart . . . oh, not for much longer . . . I feel a gentle leaving behind of all my limbs, a letting go of the fleshly parts . . . all the inner organs are becoming spongy and turning to liquid . . . the decomposition begins.

Soon my disgusting two fold self will embrace the night — the night of decomposition . . . my body will fall apart — my spirit will become free . . . the hand stopped writing and disappeared.

The Bogumil Stone

As evening came I went a little ways out of Bilek up the Vardar. Over in Macedonia that is the name of a great river, here it is a mountain that carries an ancient fortress. God knows who laid the foundations. The Serbs settled there, then later the Turks and finally the Austrian forces as border guards against Montenegro.

Now the old walls have been burst asunder and hostile Steifuni often go inside at night and on the streets down below appear things that are taken from Bilek to Kobilja Glava to be sold.

But the flanks of the mountain are riddled with uncountable boulders and strewn with the gravestones of a vanished race. In this area the Bogumil once had a large and mighty empire and perhaps somewhere nearby lay one of their cities. Nothing remains of them other than perhaps the fragments of a tower on the top of the Vardar and this swarm of graves. It is a city of the dead on the flanks of the mountain. The remainder of the fortress was destroyed from bloody wars or under the hammer of time. I think the region is so wasted and bleak because the ruins of a Bogumil city are scattered all over the soil.

I deviated from the road onto a narrow path into the confusing rocks. It did not take long to find the graves I was seeking and soon I was in the midst of them. Christians, Jews and Turks all have gravestones of standard shapes and sizes but with the Bogumil there appears to have been no standard set for them. Arbitrariness was the rule for the manifold stone shapes. There were sarcophagi, urns, plain stone slabs, upright and flat, as well as simple holes dug into the rocks . . .

In the growing dusk I carried a thought between the surrounding graves. What were the Bogumil? A race? A sect? An empire? History knew very little of them and I knew even less. A serious and quiet man, a first lieutenant, in Bilek had once told me about them. Their religion was of no known religion. It was classified as a type of ethics from which came the best phrases of Christianity and Islam. Traces of their teachings could still

be found here in the countryside where the inhabitants were not Muslims or Christians in the orthodox sense. They had no churches and needed no priests. The farmers were plain, upright, hospitable and chaste. There were none of the great crimes committed that you heard of in Europe.

I thought it over and considered how cities and nations could go to ruin and yet a thought or idea survive them and how we would gladly prepare this Bogumil fate for our enemies. It was important to recognize not only the German idea but that of entire humanity as well.

By this time it had become very dark. I stumbled among the surrounding graves and became a little confused. Then for the first time I noticed not far from me the strangest of all the Bogumil stones in this wasted cemetery.

It looked like a cross and yet like the crude shape of a person. The top end was round like a head and the stone angled down from it like two sloping shoulders to the arms of the crossbeam. It appeared that both the upright beam and the crossbeam were covered with mysterious markings.

As I bent down low to examine them someone behind me, almost at my neck said, "Good evening Herr!"

I jumped up taking a quick step to the side. In an instant my hand was in my jacket pocket where my pistol was stuck. But the man stood there calmly, motionless as if he were just one of the gravestones that had begun to speak.

"You seek the old ones, Herr," he continued. "They are gone. There is nothing remaining of them except these stones. Their entire empire is lost."

Now I could see that an old farmer stood before me. He was dressed in the customary garb, had a rifle slung over his back and the white wraps covering his legs and his sleeveless jacket glowed a little in the darkness. He was certainly a head taller than I was and it made me feel uncomfortable to encounter a stranger in the darkness, perhaps a wild man, so near the Montenegro border.

“Come along,” he said. “I will bring you to the road.”

Then he went past me indicating I should follow him through a crack in the darkness. I didn't know at all anymore where the road was and in any case it was not a good idea to be lost in the territory of the Montenegro Streifuni. After some wandering and snaking between the boulders and around the edges of the gravestones the man stopped and stood as if he had a compelling thought.

“Everything of the empire that was here is lost. You must become lost here too.”

I was not surprised at what the man said. It occurred to me that I had seen him in the bright light of the officer's mess in Bilek and then his earlier remarks. There was only one question that rang shrill in my brain at that point. It swelled into my consciousness and perhaps did amaze me somewhat.

“Where are you from?” I asked.

“I am from here,” he answered. “And you are one of the Swabians that arrived here today in the wagon without horses. I stood on the road and saw you.”

“Are you from the guard post?” I asked further.

He didn't answer, but it seemed to me that he turned his head and looked down at me from his height. I stumbled along behind him without further questions.

Then he stopped once more, “Not everything here today is of stone, hewn or unhewn. Do you know how this empire was destroyed? Through licentiousness. That is the curse that lays on the land and the people. It is the blood that has deceived and cheated us of everything around us. It lies in the blood. In every one of us is this wild, hotheaded, stream that explodes and destroys everything. Do you know how the empire was destroyed?”

The old man took his wife's son, the one that she loved, the last king of the Bogumil. They fled out of the country to the Turks, took on the

beliefs of Mohamed and convinced that country that we were now enemies. With war they broke the fortress, destroyed the city and made a wasteland out of our home.”

We stood by a sarcophagus that lay across our path. The outlander unslung his rifle and set the stone solidly on the ground.

“I know many such stones. They are troublesome to maintain. The blood won’t let them rest. Our blood is not like yours which runs peacefully, allowing itself time to build, to write, to think, to conquer the world. We don’t think about the world. We only think about the enemy, the next murder and the next love. Love and murder, that is our history. Always more love and murder. Our lives have never been enriched with the great things because we must hang our neighbor by the gullet, tear him to pieces. Our blood is our curse.”

It struck me suddenly like a red-hot steel nail through my head, something new that broke painfully through my dulled senses. Which language did this man speak? It was the language of this mountain. It was Serbian and until now I had not known that I understood Serbian. I understood him like I understood myself when I spoke my thoughts out loud. But I scarcely felt this astonishment before it gave way to an aching fear that left me stunned as I once more followed my guide further. Would the road never come?

Where was this man pulling me like a chained prisoner? We came into a still, savage and sinister landscape like the one where I had first encountered him. The limestone blocks lay like giant hewn bones in the night and they were all glowing with a shimmering skin of green and yellow that covered them. It was a soft trembling shimmering light. They looked like parts of broken up skeletons. Broken ribs and crushed leg bones surrounded us creeping out of the black earth. There was a hole here, a dark hole that you couldn’t see down into. Another mass grave perhaps . . .

“I’ve seen seven hundred dead women here. Seven hundred corpses of women fallen in battle. There is no foot of earth on this mountain that has not already drunk our blood, our savage, and wild, impetuous blood. It

rushes through us until our brain is confused and our hand grabs a knife. Our empire could not stand because our blood would not allow it. They are all fallen because of greed in particular and once more I see our empire overthrown because of the greed of the raging blood that has climbed into our brains. And our earth drinks our blood and is not sated, can't get enough, is always still dry . . . dry . . .”

He stood across from me, a head taller than I . . . or had he grown? . . . and a voice inside my head said concise and clear, “It is over.”

It is over? What? Me? My pelvis felt like it was paralyzed; a lead weight pressed my feet into the ground. The only thing I could still move was my arm. I slowly pushed my right hand into my jacket pocket but the pistol I had hidden there was gone . . . or had the feeling left my hand? Did the nerves of this sleeping sack of skin not flow to my brain any more?

What I saw in slow motion was horrible and unsettling. The outlander stood in front of me at the edge of a deep hole and towered gigantically over the dark crater. His head was under a long stretched out cloud, behind which a trace of moonlight gleamed and then vanished.

“Dry, dry,” he said.

I saw how he aimed the rifle at me.

“All our stones want blood, hewn and unhewn,” he murmured. “Always more blood, hot blood . . . there is never enough . . .”

I believe that he fired. I don't know. Later the border patrol said they didn't hear anything. Almost at the same time as the bang of the rifle I heard voices and immediately after that a light flickered in front of my feet. It was a lantern that one of the border guards carried. Four or five soldiers surrounded me . . .

I looked down and saw the solid white road under me. The outlander had not run away. He stood on the edge of the road in the dark still threatening, still with his rifle aimed. I could move my hand again and stuck it out, pointing at the figure. A border guard raised his lantern. A Bogumil stone stood there on the edge of the road, a grave stone, shaped like a cross,

and yet almost like a crude human. It was covered with mysterious markings.

My Adventure with Jonas Barg

“Gentlemen,” I began. “Life! Life! The poet says that life is not the highest good, but he is wrong. It is not only the highest, it is the only good. What we experience of happiness, of joy, of Dionysian frenzy, what we experience of the quiet comforts, are projections of life onto our souls. And our souls? What are they other than vibrations of the one infinite life, points of intersection of the two major possibilities of being; of time and space, spiraling consciousness, and above all else, life itself. Gentlemen, hooray!”

I had continued on in this manner for a long time under the approving murmurs and the encouraging shouts of my club comrades, fired up by the excellent punch, and would have continued on, if the hated voice had not called out and interrupted me. I continued on with a few more sentences trying to drown it out, until I noticed that my opponent’s words were attracting more attention than my own. My sermon collapsed right in the middle.

“See, dear friends,” he said, “you are all seized by a chemically induced megalomania. The animated compounds; which you gentlemen see as bringing forth creation, are nothing more than the green scum over a swamp full of rot and decay. Life is a process of combustion, an oxidation, or if you will; an exchange of materials, if you believe that idols are material beings. Life is a dark process in the ganglionic system of an immense monster, whose name I would rather conceal from you; flatulent gas in its intestines, and its light, gentlemen, is simply the glow of mold.”

Depending upon the state of our intoxication these words had a varying effect; the generally sober became more serious and glum, looking into their glasses and casting angry glances at this enemy of life. The strongly tipsy ones began to resist him noisily with weakening resolve. Those that were entirely drunk fell all over him; weeping around his neck, that life was such great an evil.

Jonas Barg stood in their midst unmoving, like a post, and looked at me with eyes like burning watch fires, as if he expected my answer.

“Children,” I said, “children, what use is all reasoning. Life has us and holds us; every day it gives us new miracles and unceasingly defeats every adversary from morning until evening.”

I believed that I had said something quite trivial, a subterfuge, and nonsense, but Jonas Barg screamed as if scorched by a red hot iron; hurled his glass away from himself and fell off his chair. The drunks sobbed around him, supporting each other and thoroughly soaking the shoulders of their jackets; while the others, disturbed over his tactless blazing mood, withdrew from him and gathered around me.

“Let him be,” said the engineer Munk, “he will calm down again.”

When I moved to this city from my earlier place of employment, I had made connections here with this “Club of the Dauntless” and found like-minded companions. We all went devoutly through the Temple of life, celebrating the small, hidden mysteries of this Temple as well as the celebration of wild, intoxicating orgies.

The supervisor of my previous place of employment had distanced himself because of my mad escapades. Although it helped me to be in such a company, for which I was more suited, they made even more crazy proposals than my own. I felt complete in this club of the dauntless, but I knew from the first moment on, that a hatred radiated out at me, a power worked against me, that strove to destroy me.

The odd, empty eyes of my club comrade, Jonas Barg, looked fixedly at me as if through the end of a long tunnel, and they seemed somehow threatening and dangerous. The friendliness, with which he sought to become closer to me, made me all the more suspicious; so that I often quickly and openly sensed my own inclinations, my emerging thoughts and cautions against him. My club companions felt the same way, but far less clearly.

When I asked them to clarify for me how this strange, reserved and sinister man; of whose private life no one knew anything at all, had come to

be included in their company; they all became silent with dismay. Apparently nobody had ever asked the question before. In a heavy drunkenness, at the end of a long and exuberantly passionate celebration, they had promised to invite him into the club, because of those sympathies of intoxication, which even now so strangely attracted the drunks to him. On the next day when they had to decide upon his admission, nobody wanted to be against it. An unacknowledged fear held all of their objections back. So he became a club member, even though the others feared and hated him.

Everything that had been hidden, as if through secret agreement, had now been freed through my questions. For the first time they began to wonder how they always allowed the most beautiful celebrations to be disturbed, and considered every possible way of removing him from our circle. But in the meantime they all crowded tighter around me as if seeking protection from some unknown opposition.

That evening, on which Jonas Barg so rudely interrupted my sermon with his hatred against life, was when this relationship took shape most perfectly, but Jonas Barg freed himself from his weeping friends and came up to me. He reached to shake my hand. It was a hand, whose skin appeared cold and lifeless as leather, and whose fingers snapped shut around mine like a lock.

“Opposing principles,” he said, “should not divide us. You are a friend of life. I find it neither great nor beautiful, nor good. But under these opposing views, our personal relationship should not suffer.”

“Listen,” said the engineer Munk, “it is not the sense, but the tone” . . . (my nearness allowed his courage to grow) “You have not spoken like an opponent in this matter of debate, but like one who is crazy with wrath.”

It was not possible to continue this conversation any further, because the irresistible noise of the carousing had returned, pushing with all its resistance against it. Barg sat down beside me and flung a cold kindness over me, which I felt like a cobweb on my face and around my throat. From out of our drunkenness bloomed large, red, fantastic flowers; the sight of which made us even crazier and awoke all the lower instincts to destruction.

All our jewelry was placed in a pile and pounded to a metallic powder in the mortar. Everyone took some bits in their glass, sprinkled some on the laurel wreaths that hung on the wall, and then drank the gold at the same time with the champagne and cream. Several took needles and stabbed through the flesh of their bare arms and legs, others burned their bodies with candles and in their heavy intoxication did not appear to feel the torments of the flames; the walls began to slowly turn in circles, then finally sloped sharply into each other, and all the corners leveled out at the same time to form a dome that arched over our heads, which whirled in a frantic race around some obliquely placed axis.

The club members became even friendlier toward Jonas Barg as the night progressed because of drunkenness. He sat in our midst unmoving like a post. He drank immeasurable quantities of wine out of the large vessels which we had filled with champagne and passed around. The engineer Munk sat down on the other side of him and became even more tender and urgent in his friendship. That seemed very strange to me and suddenly I saw with unpleasant clarity that we were all sitting around Barg and had accepted him as the center of our interest. I stood up and went outside in order to splash some cold water over myself. A wide stream of water gushed over my head from out of a large lion's head and into a black marble basin. It strengthened my will power by restoring a sobriety that was entirely resistant to suggestion. As I straightened up, I felt Jonas Barg behind me.

He looked at me with his empty eyes as if from far away, and the hatred darkened his voice as he said, "You are a poor club member. Is this the promised dauntlessness? Do you want to interrupt the momentum of our festivities with a water cure?"

I pulled myself together as if in the ring with a strong opponent.

"Life demands limits to madness. And moreover, where is the dauntlessness that you praise as well as a club mate. I've never seen you in a frenzy of joy."

His head dropped between his shoulders as if struck by a blow and he let me pass back into the hall. Most of the intoxicated noise of my

companions had faded away. They sat there lifeless and insensible in all kinds of positions; with foaming mouths and drooled confused words.

“The banquet of Plato by Sophocles,” cried the engineer Munk.

But when morning came and the others lay under the tables, they still sat there.

“My Plato,” he spoke weeping into the tangled beard of Jonas Barg and sobbed with emotion.

“Let’s go,” said Barg and offered me his arm. “Take it. We will be able to return home with united forces.”

“I thank you, but my own power will suffice. If you would like to be of service, support your friend Munk.”

There was nothing more terrible to me about this strange man than his eyes, which had the ability to bind with his dangerous will far more than his mouth did. He silently took the heavily drunken man under his arm; and as we took our coats from the equally drunken servants and got dressed; followed us down the steps, from whose walls scornful masks grinned down.

The morning was damp and foggy, and in the early dawn the shops began their food preparations. During the night immense masses of snow had fallen, piled up on all the roofs and forced the street sweepers into strenuous labor to clear the way. We had scarcely gone more than a few steps, when there was a strong gust behind us, and at the same moment a driving snow swirled around us and tore at us. There stood Jonas Barg next to a pile of snow, unmoving as a post, and his eyes glowed in the dim light of early dawn.

“Where is Munk? Munk!”

Barg pointed at the still slightly moving pile of snow, which quietly settled down to rest like an animal after a successful leap. We threw ourselves at the mountain of snow which filled half the street, and began to dig with hands and sticks. The street sweepers joined in after careful

consideration in the hopes of rescuing some unfortunate. Several bakers' boys set down their bread baskets and helped dig until half of a body was uncovered in the snow. The early pedestrians on the street, half frozen drunkards, gathered around us to gawk at the amusing scene until they were sent away grinning by several watchmen who eagerly investigated the cause of the accident and wrote down the number of the house, from whose steep roof the avalanche had slipped, into their little books.

After half an hour we had freed our friend. He lay there dead before us, with a broken neck, or suffocated or from a heart attack. I don't know which.

We did not ask about it, because it was the highest law of the Club of the Dauntless, to not speak of death or of the dead. When one of us died from within our circle, it was to us, as if he was simply gone, and no word of sympathy was permitted to follow his memory. Only a glass stood at his place for one year. That was all that our Constitution permitted to be placed in silent memory.

It was hard for me to cope with my pain and my terror. Often I was almost overwhelmed with horror about my friend, but it was all so vague, so full of suspected hideousness, that I scarcely dared think about it clearly.

At that moment it had seemed to me, as if Jonas Barg had reached up and miraculously pulled down that giant white grave of plunging snow next to him; as if the movement of his arm was still descending after giving a command, and a bestial smile had been pasted on his cruel, narrow lips. As soon as this thought occurred to me, a labyrinth of questions confronted me. What if I had gone in Munk's place? Would I have been killed by the avalanche? Is that why he had offered me his arm?

I had no doubts that my friends also suffered under similar thoughts, but we said nothing to each other, and repressed our fears in heroic battles. We held to our fixed principles, and as often happens; it incited us to even more mad escapades of spontaneous hilarity; to wild dances far beyond the standards of our club.

I must confess that the maddest escapades came from me, and that it was also I that instigated the incident with the acrobatics. From an inextinguishable thirst after the tantalizing bizarre, the thought occurred to me, to transform our entire club into a band of performers; to turn all quiet, common pleasures upside down and through the introduction of obstacles include the new sensations of danger and difficulty into our old desires. Our statutes obliged us to physical fitness, and most of us were exquisite acrobats, many were also swimmers, rowers, fencers and riders. We soon succeeded in performing such simple tricks as jumping through hoops, balancing, and the free fall of the trapeze.

To the extent, that we progressed from easier to more difficult exercises, our pleasure grew in these things, and we were scarcely in a position to take our meals, with our heads hanging down from swings, twirling our plates on a fork, or squatting down on the tight rope to cut our meat. Yes, we had even included a tight rope in our program, and my dear friend Dittrich, who had moved into Munk's place, distinguished himself in the field as well as myself. We could do it just as well as many of the neighboring acrobats, who astounded the farmers with their performances. And it speaks well of our strong wills, that we were able to achieve what professional artists only achieved after years of practice. Our club base transformed itself into a circus. It's over refined perfumes gave way to the smell of sweat and the odor of overheated bodies.

In this tension of all forces, we felt comfortable and forgot that which we were obliged to be quiet about. Only Jonas Barg did not seem to agree with this transformation. He, who seemed to blossom in our crashes and likewise withered in our convulsive gaiety, seemed to find our new pursuits uncomfortable and shriveled up, so that he became more boney and scornful. When we invited him to participate in our performances, he could do as well as the best of us, even though we never saw him seriously practice. But his manner had a spidery angularity, an agility without joints that was extremely unpleasant to watch, like something that was not human.

But the craziest idea in this part of the life of our club did not come from me.

“Now children,” said my friend, Dittrich, one evening. “Do you know that tomorrow the first performance of the Barnum Circus begins?”

He sat at his meal on the tightrope with crossed legs, tipped his head back and took a drink out of a champagne bottle, as we laughed up at him.

“Naturally, naturally! Well, what about it?”

“What about it? Gentlemen! Children! The most self-evident can never be discovered. We will go to the show and greet the performers as colleagues.”

The proposal was just strange enough, for us to agree to it. I was one of the most enthusiastic supporters of this idea, until Jonas Barg’s warm interest began to make me suspicious.

He came up to me with his repulsive friendliness, which he incessantly pursued and said, “This idea is so good that it could have even been yours.”

“Thank you.”

“Now we can demonstrate our skills before an audience that can appreciate them. Only those who know the exact details of a skill can truly appreciate its mastery in the performance of others.”

“Certainly, certainly!”

I left him standing, because I could not bear the staring of his eyes. But I felt their gaze at my back.

Barnum brought its immense equipment into our city the next day, pitched its tent in a couple of hours, and was prepared to give its first performance that evening. We viewed its hideous abnormalities and then tracked the work of the performers with knowledgeable criticism in the great ring.

The attendants prepared our tunics in the dressing rooms. After the performance, the Ringmaster agreed with our plan, through the prospect of

a fun and exuberant night. We finally convinced him to keep it a secret from the other circus performers. A strange meeting awaited us as we entered the arena again a short time later after our transformation. At first they looked at us as if we were a hostile army, but then accepted us as tables were quickly set up and heavily laden with food.

The suspicious Ringmaster had at first only sacrificed the narrow light of his gasoline burner so that a sinister high wall of darkness surrounded our group in the immense space. After the first course of the best food in the city, provided by the city board, the voices rose, and the Ringmaster stood up, and in broken German, praised the unexpected hospitality of us amateurs. One of us replied in even more broken English, and then the arc lamps flickered on to solidly illuminate the area.

We found ourselves mixed together according to the dictates of a grotesque humor. The moss girl sat on the lap of the finance counselor; the giant lady held a Lieutenant in her arms like a baby, laying him across her ample breasts; and the monkey woman let a textile manufacturer crawl into the furs with her. Two legal secretaries and a professor studied a map of Borneo on the tattooed body of a Malayan. The freaks had also found their friends. The skeleton man conversed with a doctor over medical questions; the largest man in the world, perhaps attracted by the strange sympathy of opposites, sat next to the petite attorney; and the smallest man in the world, like the dwarf king in the fairy tales, had his tall chair snuggled up next to the gigantic pharmacist, whom, rumor had it, could crush a porcelain goblet with one hand in a fit of anger. The other club comrades were shyer and the performers, the acrobats, Japanese jugglers and the clown pulled them into their colorful array. My friend Dittrich stretched out like a large ostrich next to the beautiful tight rope walker, Miss Ellida, who glittered like a snake and enthralled him with her stupendous scientific knowledge of tightrope walking. I saw him puffed up with pleasure; while I myself was engaged in a confidential conversation with the Arabian animal tamer Fatme in a comfortable Viennese dialect over the training of wild animals.

I insisted, and Fatme had the kindness to show me the crude grips of her profession on my own body.

Our happiness was so loud and noisy that bestial answering bellows came from out of the cages of the menagerie surrounding us, and it seemed as if we sat in a circle of howling demons. The demonstrations of our new friendship became even more ardent, and those caresses, which in our remote corner were heating up to the point of an explosion. I felt that something was about to happen, something that compelled me to apply all caution in resisting the ardent whispers of Fatme, who was even then showing me another grip with her solid fists. Suddenly I heard the voice of Jonas Barg, who sat there in the middle of our collective brotherhood, unmoving as a post.

“We sit here, celebrating us and you, as colleagues, but except for our outfits, we have still not given any legitimate demonstration. We should show you what we can do.”

The others did not reflect long, jumped into the sand of the arena and began to show their skills; which Barnum’s performers watched in amazement at so much unexpected dexterity. But Jonas Barg did not appear to be satisfied with this triumph and proposed that Dittrich and I should go up onto the tightrope.



“Only being up there decides whether we possess power, courage and perseverance,” and he pointed to the top of the tented roof at the tightrope that Miss Ellida walked upon during her performance.

I consider it my duty, to confess here, that I felt such a terror at that moment, was seized by such a deathly fear, that it was as if I had stepped upon the edge of an abyss and an inevitable judgment was pronounced. But Dittrich looked into the beautiful mocking eyes of Ellida and agreed, so impassioned by her glittering snake like body, so much so, that I scarcely dared to refuse. All the objections of the Ringmaster were struck down, and several of the assistants were already holding the rope ladder which we were supposed to climb up to get to the high wire. My mind raced for an immeasurably short time, trying to find any possibility of salvation, impassioned by a fear, that it could only all end in madness. I found nothing. I found nothing . . .

I could only shout out, “But the net, there is no net . . .”

“With the net it is not dauntless,” said Jonas Barg like an executioner.

“With the net it’s common labor,” said the beautiful Ellida and laughed.

“Come on,” cried Dietrich and seized the low hanging rope ladder.

I saw his arm muscles swell up under his tunic and would have liked to tear him away from there, when I saw the eyes of Jonas Barg glowing like hot irons in a cave. I was given no choice then, but to follow him. Hesitantly, I took two steps and then stumbled over a half buried bottle in the sand of the arena — it stung me. I screamed out and folded together. They sprang to me and lifted me up, found out that I had injured my foot, and set me down onto a chair. Now the demonstration of my skills had passed, and my soft whimpering aroused the beautiful Fatme to such compassion that her rough fists became entirely soft and tender.

But Dittrich grabbed angrily and climbed high up the rope ladder without any concern for me; pulled himself higher and then clambered over

our heads again, while the tears came so hot and heavy out of my eyes that Fatme, who had been made weak by my pain, softly sobbed too.

Then Dittrich appeared in the region of the roof, grabbed the rope and began the quick retracing of his passage with the balancing beam. He carefully set one foot before the other, until he found a solid stance, and let out a piercing yell that echoed back even more quickly.

Around us answered the bellows, grunts and howls of the animals and the loud shouting came together and swelled across the floor to us and seemed to oppress my lungs like steam.

I scarcely dared to breathe, because I felt Jonas Barg next to me, and just then, as Dittrich crouched down for a short rest in the middle of the rope, he said into my ear:

“You are too cautious, my dear friend, to be a member of the club of the dauntless. Do you expect me to believe that you have wounded your foot, as well?”

He knew it . . . he knew it, that I was playing a comedy, by God, a miserable, pitiful comedy, in order not to go up on the tight rope, that I had left my friend in the lurch like a coward, because I was afraid of death, because I was afraid of him, Jonas Barg. He laughed right next to me, and then, without even looking back, I believed I could feel that he was gone. Stretched out next to the fawning Fatme, I sought to support my friend high above us with my eyes, and involuntarily moved my feet with his.

Suddenly I saw a shadow, a long stretched out shadow with angular movements, with an inorganic agility, that was climbing up the suspended rope ladder. This shadow . . . this ghastly spidery shadow—it was him. No one saw him. No one screamed. I didn't scream either. I could only beat with my arms around me and jump up, during which I saw, that the shadow had reached the rope, stood upright and in the brightness of the electrical light looked exactly like a pillar of fog as it slid forward.

Dittrich was almost at the end of the rope and preparing to turn around when the shadow reached him. I still see it before me, how the end of the balance beam began to swing wildly, how Dittrich stood still, trying

to regain his equilibrium. At that moment the shadow sprang onto the back of my friend, and as Dittrich's pale face suddenly turned around towards us, I believed for the space of a heart beat that I could see the grin of Jonas Barg. Dittrich cried out, entirely different from before, not in jubilation, but in deathly fear. He let the balancing beam fall and brought both hands to his throat, as if he wanted to become free of choking fists. The battle above was very short, a wrestling with the relentless power of the earth, which pulled his body out and threw it down with tangled limbs. He fell down so close to the feet of Miss Ellida, that her glittering, snake like body recoiled backwards.

I did not press through to the shattered body. I had no other thought during this incident than to seek out Jonas Barg. As I turned around, he stood next to me, and his eyes, which lay like glowing irons in dark caves, held me, even though I wanted to throw myself at him. I still had no power over him; still had to find the words that would free me from him.

The silence after the death of Dittrich was more unbearable than a bodily pain, and most unbearable for me, because I thought I had seen something so strange, that I almost violated the strict protocols. It urged me to break the laws of the club, and often, in the dusk of evenings, when our tiresome jocularly lost its glow; I was almost ready to speak out about it, what everyone was thinking about. The dislike of the club members against Jonas Barg had grown even greater and become entirely obvious, as if they suspected the same thing that made me uneasy, without being able to put a name to it.

Only Jonas Barg himself appeared to notice nothing. He came and went like before, without any of us being able to discover the mystery of his regular life. Despite my efforts, I discovered nothing either. Only one thing was very clear to me, he did not live in the city. He was absolutely immaterial, like a force of nature.

We wanted to tear down the old performance room and begin our new games that first week. Professor Hannak, who in the breaks between our escapades pursued historical studies, brought up the idea of an historical masquerade, in which we would distance ourselves from the present, and give ourselves over to the spirits of a forgotten time. In our efforts to

quickly seize upon something new, and to completely forget our two friends, in whose silent memories two empty glasses were set; we turned to anything at that time, whose merriment was whipped to a fever pitch, until it became a fearful whirlwind.

The wantonness with which we celebrated our orgies in the style of the Persian kings, the time of decadent Rome, and the French Rococo period almost achieved on a small scale the luxuries of those times themselves. In the entire city, whose murmur we in our strongly closed company had learned to despise, they spoke of our impulses. They regarded us as lost, and the more they pressed us, the louder we laughed and our greatest lunatic escapades became increasingly intemperate.

Something drove us onward, something that we were trying to escape, because we hated it, and it appeared to me, as if there was some connection between this impulse and Jonas Barg, who always participated unmoving as a post. It was no longer an escalating quest for life, but something else, perhaps its exact opposite; as I admitted in the gray days after our raging nights. It was not recklessness any more, but lunacy, that tore us through all the labyrinths of pleasure, and none of us were for a moment in doubt, that it was only a coincidence that the police had not yet turned against us.

One day Jonas Barg stood up in our midst and his eyes stared straight at me, as he invited us to a feast with him.

“I see you are very surprised, gentlemen,” he said, “that I invite you to me, because until now I have not led any of you to my place. But my often very troublesome restraint has always been stronger than my desire to invite you over. But now, because your interests touch my own, I dare to invite you to come. Namely, I am also a historian, self understandably an amateur, and for years have lived for several weeks during these beautiful autumn days in the ruins of castle Neufels.”

“Neufels is in ruin,” cried the lieutenant.

“That is precisely why I love the castle so much, because as you know, I search out decay. By the way, I can reassure you that, with me you

will be able to find your old, strong instinct for life.”—the empty eyes burned—commanded.

“Let it be my concern to make your visit with me so entertaining, that all of your desires will die away, to receive from out of my pockets. You shall be in need of nothing, or better said, shall desire nothing, which you now consider indispensable.”

Despite Jonas Barg’s attempt to transform his creaking and screeching voice into a cordial hiss, I sensed a hidden threat, a sense of secret malice in his words. And it was that way for the others as well, as their consent barely concealed a boundless hatred against this man, who seemed to force out our own decision according to his own will. We all growled like wild beasts against the tamer, and I strove in vain to free myself from out of the commotion, in order to win back any safety; because Jonas Barg had made a strong and certain victory against me. It was a struggle for my “I”, whose better part, whose courage and confidence seemed to have been banished through an enchantment.

It was in such a condition that the most important transformations were nursed in an almost imperceptible way, moving forward without conscious control.

Some imperceptible reason; the color of the air, a lost and again found word, the fragment of a melody from afar, the cry of a bird, the chortling of the waves on the edge of the beach, worked like a heavy blow, and released an entire multitude of connections; a sudden frenzy tore down all the laws of psychology and logic, swung out over all possibilities and worked the most miraculous transformations within me. Of the strange things that I still have to tell, this is the strangest, which I experienced the evening before the feast. I stood on the bridge over the river, looked at the dirty water, in which the pollution of the factories floated and felt, as if I was gently sliding against the current. The whistles and foghorns of the surrounding factories howled out the end of the work day. Two girls went behind me laughing on the other side. Someone pushed me. On the other side a policeman stood next to a man with Turkish honey and sugar figs, spinning the threads of a peaceful conversation.

In that moment I spoke entirely calmly and softly to myself.

“If you reverse the name Barg it reads . . . G . . . r . . . a . . . b . . . or said out loud “Grab” [translator’s note: grab means “grave” in the German language].

I was frightened and trembled over my entire body, so that I had to hold onto the hand railing of the bridge. But then with the return of my strength I felt an immense joy, because I knew, that I had found the word of power over my enemy.

According to the proposal of professor Hannak we had conjured up the time of Velasquez in Spain for the banquet and in a little railway station the next evening transformed ourselves into Spanish Grandees, monks, painters and soldiers; and then went up to the ruins on foot. Our procession surprised and astonished several farmers that we encountered on the steep path coming down from the ruins, because we maintained an apprehensive seriousness that kept all thoughts of a masquerade away from us. I was the last one of all, with a full consciousness of the fearful experience that awaited, and was determined to defend us with all means possible.

In the courtyard, between dilapidated stairs, Jonas Barg crouched on a stone in the garments of a fool and after a short greeting, skipped on ahead as our leader. The cracked walls closed in on us from all sides and pressed us into a tiny passage, whose walls bore acetylene lamps at certain intervals. They jumped out of the damp walls like blooming tulips and illuminated the path, upon which Jonas Barg, with the strangest contortions, skipped ahead. From time to time he turned his pale face toward us, in order to convince himself that we were all following him. The passage was endless and from whose brightness side passages crawled off into darkness; and it seemed to me, as if Barg was intentionally leading us in a circle. The gigantic pharmacist was undaunted enough to dare tell jokes, even here, while the others had all been overwhelmed by paralysis. His laborious encouragements were not heeded by anyone, and only when we stood in the great vaulted banquet hall did the others find the courage to speak. Here the host had happily created the sense of a fanatical and closeted time. One such luxury this banquet appeared to have established, as an example, was

cruelty which served also as a duty, a piety that bound itself to lechery without shame.

In this vault beneath the rubble of an old castle all the treasures of an Indian princely court were showcased and arranged with a gloomy ostentation, as if they could incite the aroma and spirit of religious ecstasy even more than the refinement of Spain.

Nearby the banquet table was set with various things, from the most out of the way places that with shameless skill held their indecencies. There stood drinking cups that in their masterful craftsmanship rendered nothing less than the suffering of Christ. The bread lay on the plate with despicable scorn, and imprinted as if consecrated with the holy letters, I. N. R. I. and the napkins of the finest fabric were replicas of the sweat cloth of Veronica.

[Translator's note: the sixth station of the cross in the passion play of Christ where Veronica wipes the sweat from the face of Jesus]

The pelts of silver gray rabbits were used as coasters, but with these animals, the pelts had been pulled off their living bodies and they lay covered with blood and still twitching under a glass dome in front of the plate of every participant at this meal. In the middle of the table rose a cross with a life sized marble Christ, whose eyes were lit from the inside and glowed out so that the entire table was illuminated. Besides this light, every guest also had special little lamps at each place, in which strange candles burned. They looked like dried flesh and smelled of spices and resin.

Around the table, at which we sat with disgust and horror, were displayed precious tapestries in richly detailed scenes from out of the life of the court, images of the seasons, and landscapes from out of the immense regions of the world ruled by Spain. Our servants brought the prepared dishes from out of an adjoining room, in closed containers and carried in with trembling limbs, while Jonas Barg sprang here and there between the people, beating them with a whip and scolding them because of their slowness and awkwardness.

I sat between the professor, whose long beard jutted out from his chin like a horn, and the attorney, whose limbed were shivering in his

monk's robe. I sat and could not look away from the twitching animal that was dying in front of me under the glass dome. I was determined to enjoy nothing of this meal, and to drink nothing out of these cups, on whose gold surface a rude joke was embossed.

Jonas Barg was entirely different than usual, his immobility appeared to have fallen from him like a mask, but the silly fool, the way he fulfilled the duty of host, made him even more hideous. His eyes glowed, and suddenly I found the comparison in me, which I had been trying in vain for so long to find; it was how the fires of hell showed out from between a cleft in the earth's crust. He skipped from one to the other of us, urging us to eat and drink and continued in the same manner at the places where two empty glasses stood; where, as always, two glasses were placed in memory of our dead friends.

So the evening continued until midnight, and a kind of mania took hold of my friends, that originated from out of the same instinct, as the desire of criminals to be baptized, before they are led to their death. The complete torment of the festivities under the glowing eyes of the image of Christ became in that moment for me, the dead, bloody cadaver under the glass bells; and the odor of the incense, which came from the candles became decaying meat for me; the only one who, in the expectation of danger had preserved his sobriety. It was so repulsive, that an angry disgust threatened to overwhelm me. The most disgusting thing happened around midnight, when several members from the city joined in with the pleasures of known prostitutes, showing their prowess in lewd dances and rolling around with them on the great carpet under the catcalls of the onlookers.

After Jonas Barg had chased them away again with his whip, the immense pharmacist raised himself weakly from his place and began to babble praises for our host, in which he richly included mangled Spanish curses, which he had learned one time on a summer voyage to the Pyrenees. Jonas Barg stood up to reply; his lurking eyes looked straight at me, and he spoke; and his words seemed to dance like stones in his mouth.

“Oh, my friend, it makes me so happy that my banquet meets your approval. I have long hesitated to bring you to my kingdom, because I was worried that your courage and high spirits would find it a bit too gloomy

here. But now to my happy amazement I find, right under the shadows of that which our statutes forbids, that life blooms that much brighter and louder. Here, surrounded by the symbolic images of the power of decay, of the manifold transformations of one and the same—or shall I say—encircled by it, your merriment still springs out entirely differently than the superficial surface of things. And take heed, gentlemen, it shall become much lustier yet.”

He commanded the wine to be poured and raised his tankard with the heavy, viscous, dark red fluid; but only after convincing himself that the precious glasses in front of the empty places of our dead friends were also filled.

“Now gentlemen, with this wine, the best of the Spanish wines from out of my cellar, I receive you completely. Now for a happy continuation of our celebration. Even though I, as you know, do not in any way share your exuberant love of life; I do know the duty of being a host and invite you to salute your tyrant, life, in the same way that those gladiators about to die saluted Caesar one last time.”

While all the others lifted their glasses to this strange toast, I poured my wine unobserved onto the earth in the same manner that I had gotten rid of the contents of countless other glasses. Then on a whim I nonchalantly went over to the places set for our dead friends, stood before the full glasses and watched . . . as the dark red contents of the glasses slowly disappeared, even though no hand lifted them and no lips touched them.

Then I knew that the moment of battle had come. —With a repulsive grin Jonas Barg surveyed the entire group of revelers, who had long since forgotten their mummery; stared into the faces of every single one of them and spoke, as he tapped the flat of this hand with his whip.

“Now children, we are going to take a little stroll. Between the scenes of these two tapestries is a passage that leads to the entrance of the well-tended park of the Escorial court. We desire to follow the old customs, and I ask each of you, to come with me into my park.”

He stretched out his hand commandingly towards the great wall tapestries, on whose colored surface groups of trees and the meadow of a park had been portrayed in elaborate embroidery. As I followed his hand I saw the trees and bushes stand out evermore perfectly, then tower up in plastic masses, rushing together to unite in a crowded canopy of treetops. The winding path extended far out from the cluster of trees into the winding meadow and led to a wide open countryside. Until now everything had remained the size of a model, but then the trees grew from the size of toys to take on real physical aspects. They bowed in the night wind, and covered the empty spaces between their trunks with moist shadows. The darkened images became deep and so dangerously beautiful, that I, who was prepared for anything, trembled.

A mighty, mysterious park lay before us.

“Now children, take torches along to light our way. The cute candles of mummified fingers and toes, of leg bones and clavicles will give us enough light.”

In a frenzy of victory Jonas Barg took no notice of me, seized his candlestick and everyone—everyone silently took up the candles next to their plates, and arranged themselves into a long procession, and all of them—all of them began to follow him. Jonas Barg skipped on ahead and it seemed as if he had entered into the shadows of the first group of trees, when I became overcome with fear and burst out:

“Jonas Barg,” I screamed, “Jonas Barg! Give back to the grave that which has come from out of the grave!”

Then, as if in a sudden earthquake the silhouettes of all the objects in front of me disappeared. The trees and bushes, the entire night darkened park disappeared into the distance of a foggy background, before which a grotesque drama was enacted. In front of this background, that towered up over every gesture like a decoration, stood Jonas Barg, seized by fearful spasms that tore him around and pulled his body back and forth. He tried to straighten up and reached for me with his long arms. But his hands sank back down; his face stared in horror like a death mask, and suddenly he disappeared into the gaping darkness with a terrible scream.

I cannot possibly say how long this darkness lay upon us, it could not have been more than a few minutes, but when life once more disturbed the space of the abyss, it seemed to have ripped apart the fabric of time as well. The first impression of my return to consciousness was my labored breathing.

It was my own breathing, but soon I could distinguish the sound of others near me, and through the groping darkness and broken whispers we convinced ourselves that we were all still alive. As lights and voices from the outer shores of our darkness called us back into the world from silence and darkness; we scarcely dared to call out for our salvation and sought to demonstrate the composure in misfortune written down in our statutes.

The crowd of our rescuers turned down the narrow passage toward us. The farmers, who had met our strange procession with astonishment, had raised the alarm when we had not returned from the ruins after three days and the rescue expedition had found us after long searches and dangerous wanderings through the half closed passages that were threatening to collapse. The torches flickered in the subterranean chamber casting our shadows on the walls like prehistoric monsters of the ancient world. Where the table had stood lay a rubbish pile of dirt; the walls were bare and glistened with gray slime. But at the places of the wall tapestries, whose embroidered park landscapes had been transformed into reality, at that place, where Jonas Barg had disappeared with a fearful scream, a black hole gaped between the quadrants of the foundation wall, down which our investigation found a gaping abyss. This was the path of Jonas Barg and through which he had been leading the procession.

I would not give up until I, with the help of ladders tied together, with rope and a torch, dared the descent and all my companions followed behind me. I told myself that this inexplicable burden must be undertaken, if we ever wanted to look life in the eyes again. It went down into the depths of a well, but it was much more than a well, it was a murderer's grave that served to conceal a bloody secret in the old castle. When we finally reached the bottom, we found a fissure that led down even further, and in the darkness below, right next to the swirling water was a skeleton. The arms were tied behind its back and the legs chained over a cross; between the white teeth of the death's head a cloth had been stuck, which

was now decayed and rotten, but still in a good enough condition to perfectly show the marks of how it had been forcefully pressed into the long silent mouth.

Although there was no indication to suggest that this skeleton had some relationship to our missing host, we all knew that the last remains of Jonas Barg lay there in front of us. And it seemed as if my friends, in a sudden explosion, became free of their long accumulated and repressed hatred. They gnashed their teeth together, bellowed like raging animals, and wanted to fall upon the skeleton with fists and knives.

Then compassion came into me, which announced itself darkly, as I again saw him in writhing in convulsions in front of the night park landscape; it came to me large and radiant and as I shooed my friends back it gave me the words:

“Gentlemen, preserve the magnanimity of the living even against death. How he must have loved and enjoyed life, so much so that he was compelled to seek it out, even though he hated it and wanted to destroy it.”

With a gesture the onlookers led my friends away from the skeleton, who with lowered heads followed me out of the well and out of the old castle; out, to where life with its radiant autumn day waited for us.

The Repulsion of the Will

The thing that was venerable about our friend Eleagabal Kuperus was his full, long gray beard. It flowed from his face like the wrath from the countenance of Jehovah. Two triangular, pointed, yellow ivory tusks in the corners of his mouth were what was unusual about him. When he smiled they crept over his gray patriarch's beard like dragons over the forest underbrush. And when he laughed, you could see that he had no other teeth at all in his entire mouth, other than those two upper canine teeth, which sat in his bulging red jaw.

But the venerable and the unusual met in his eyes and mixed in an iridescent greenish gray; the way water shimmers when it stands for a long time and whose clear natural purity is free of the dirty factory waste that pollutes in the honor of some indispensable industry; or the color of the sky, over whose happy expanse suddenly glides mysterious shadows and lights.

To be alone with Eleagabal Kuperus was joy and terror. We were alone with him, very much alone, at least 1000 meters above all other solitary things.

Fireworks exploded near us and Kuperus reached out into the small rain of artificial lightning that snaked like fire around his withered hand. Then everything was dark again; only a faint bubbling glow cooked out of the deep, above which the gondola appeared to be lightly swimming.

Above us swelled the immense body of a balloon, like the belly of a giant soaring animal. We stood in the night, fixed in space, in a condition of complete equilibrium between the pull from above, and the gravitational force of the earth.

“This is the place to talk of things that we cannot understand down below,” said Kuperus as he whittled with his knife at his bluish black fingernails, through which white, half-moons showed at the roots of the

nails. They lay like protective steely capsules over especially fine, sensitive nerve endings in need of protection.

– “Do you mean to say that this few hundred meters height has the capacity to change our spirits that much?” asked Richard Lionheart.

Our courageous friend asked this question defensively, but I was resolved to grasp the strangeness of this hour and felt ashamed, that he wanted to save himself. Kuperus looked at him and then smiled, in such a way that the ends of his teeth showed like the curious and dangerous tips of curving daggers.

“Young man, you carry the honorable name of Lionheart with good reason. Down there alone, when confronted with mouth and claws, with brass or explosives you keep your composure. You are a worthy hold over from the great century of enlightenment; one who has purified his soul several times in the fire of materialism. It has often appeared to me, as if you at times sit at the table with a hollow belly or at least are immune to the articles in Diderot’s Encyclopedia. But now that we are suspended between heaven and earth, you should not forget that ‘there gives more things’ . . .”

“I don’t believe in them,” said Lionheart curtly, as if with that clubbing blow he wanted to destroy that which he did not dare to look at any closer.

“Belief is a crutch, for whose use we must have a solid ground beneath us. It is one of the products of the earth and lays down there between those displays of wood and stucco palaces, which we have so happily escaped. The laws of the Spirit change quickly, the more distant we are from there, where they codify them in order to believe in them, more distant — in a relationship, whose graphic portrayal I leave for psychophysics to contemplate.”

“What do you want to say about it?”

“Nothing more, other than that up here we are more sensitive despite all of its power, which down below compels consciousness to flow under a cover of ice. Perhaps we will be shown entirely extraordinary phenomena, when we succeed in transplanting ourselves into this empty air

space, something different, like the light of the Geissler tubes, that emits its wonderful blossoms in a vacuum.”

[Translator’s note: Geissler tubes were the precursors to neon lights.]

“You compare physical experiments with those of the spirit.”

Kuperus let his hand with the pocket knife hang over the edge of the gondola, so that the shimmer of the lighted city below glinted on the blade. The large yellow canines crawled out of the gaping mouth in a silent laugh.

“Now you try saving yourself in duality and might as well become a Monist and convince yourself of the agreement between the laws of physicality and those of the soul. I don’t want to confuse you and only ask you to take the Geissler tubes as an image.”

The Italian festival in the wooden city down there below us, over which our captive balloon hung in the night, set off two fiery suns at the same time, which began their rotations not far beneath us. They whirled and rattled around an uncertain axis, and a reflection of their sparkling life appeared in the venerable and strange eyes of our friend Kuperus. The blade of the pocket knife glimmered red like the tip of a glowing iron.

“I want to show you a small thing, an easily achieved experiment. In this condition of equilibrium, in which we now find ourselves, every bodily movement produces a rocking of this gondola, although, naturally, you do not want this, because it is not comfortable to establish the condition of a sea storm way up here. Really think about it, how painful it would be if the gondola turned into a pendulum, and you attempted to keep it as quiet as possible.”

Richard Lionheart was silent under the eyes of our friend and I looked at him. That was what he was really doing, trying to keep the gondola from rocking. The wicker basket swam lightly on a sea of silence between heaven and earth, and only the suns rattled slowly and tiredly as they turned beneath us, so that the solitude became heavier and more immense. It was like the bleakness of a locked room that is filled with the humming of dying flies; that, through some coincidence wandered into their

grave and vainly pushed themselves to death against the dusty window glass.

Suddenly I understood why we sat up there; why Eleagabal took us on this nightly climb using all his persuasive skills on us; and the intentional bribes, which he had to use on the English authorities to purchase this balloon ride. I could hear all of their objections.

“Herr, no, no, that is against our policy. It is also forbidden by the police. And something really could happen.”

Our friend’s response, at the last one, as he regarded the gentlemen with a smile, “I was there, when the first airship crashed, and nothing happened to me, other than getting my front teeth knocked out.”

And with that I felt the sky above me, like a soft wave, and the light of the Milky Way, which flowed down upon me like a veil.

Suddenly, Richard Lionheart cried, “Watch out, do you feel that! Do you feel that?”

His hands gripped at the edges of the gondola and his fear contorted fingers dug into the wicker basket. His face was distorted by terror and an inability to breathe; his bloodshot eyes stared straight out, like those of someone being whipped. The twin points of Eleagabal’s patriarch beard trembled.

“It will pass.”

“Magician, conjurer,” said Richard Lionheart, and his exhaustion made him entirely limp, like a collapsing children’s balloon.

He leaned back and breathed heavily.

“You have experienced the storm and the rocking entirely by yourself, the two of us have remained solidly in the gondola, do you understand this?”

“You can see this trick in any of the better market places.”

“You are wrong if you take this for some type of suggestion. I have been entirely passive and let it work all by itself. Here you have a beautiful little experiment in the repulsion of the will.”

“You are not going to confuse me anymore with your mystical words.”

“I cannot do anymore then give you the needed explanation. For centuries we have found in our so called superior Western civilization, a gruesome confusion that exists through all of its dimensions, the belief that the will is a blessing for the bringing of power. Having no will is thought of as unlucky, the one afflicted with a sick will is called a criminal in the language of our culture. Will is the same as power, and all dramatists of all times have glorified nothing else other than the will in their works. In doing this they overlook the fact that any working power creates a reaction.

In the physical world they recognize this and have calculated the recoil of the powder and of the rocket. But because of a loud pride they have not noticed the more remote working of the will, and the devastation which is caused in its proximity. That means they don't notice that both originate out of one and the same cause. The dramatist consoles himself over this incalculable reaction with the construction of a mystical destiny, and the metaphysicians, blind moles in the ground of reality, grope around in torturous tunnels after knowledge.

Your applied will has entirely counterbalanced your equilibrium and quiet and has placed the gondola in motion for you. There is only one thing lacking, that my friend and I do not have the same directed will as yours, have not enveloped and helped strengthen it so as to bring the storm you experience into reality. The will of the masses and its repulsion frustrates each power individually and collectively creates world history.”

“You are witty Eleagabal Kuperus, but the sun will set, and your words freeze into clinging ice.”

The illuminated city became quiet and its lights were extinguished. The stars hung in the pale night, with the melancholy brilliance of their isolation. The shadow of Eleagabal's head was separated from the rest of

his body by the high edge of the gondola and cast its shadow against the green damask of the balloon, like the head of John the Baptist on a dark platter.

“Would you like some more examples, so you can understand me more clearly? Do you know the secret of the unending melody? I don’t mean the musical principle of happiness, as Wagner calls it, the one that states that the movement of the melody overcomes all natural attempts at completion, so that its horizon continues to expand infinitely.

Instead, I mean any small sequences of a few beats, which are so downright complete, are so enclosed within themselves, that they can be repeated endlessly. A chord of notes, that circles repeatedly and in every repetition simply repeats itself over again. Mozart brought such melodies out of himself in his sunny hours and the completion of creation itself comes out of the various lower octaves.

When our ear understands this melody for the first time, the will then responds with every possible attempt to escape from it, only to generate a new impetus in a resounding repetition at a new octave. The normal human can easily determine that the power of repulsion is small, as is the positive power of the will. The artist carries the synthesis of both forces within himself and becomes suspended like we are, fixed solidly between heaven and earth. Lunacy enters in, when the greatness of the repulsion overcomes the forward impulse.”

Eleagabal’s hand, which held the pocket knife, that fearful withered hand, between whose sinews narrow grooves of shadows began to show, slid in a playful manner back and forth on the edge of the gondola.

“We must seize all that is before our eyes with certainty, as long as our will is living within us, as well as the lunacy which is just as near. This is according to the law of the relationship between power and repulsion. We do not dare judge this spiritual balance in the terms of physical formulas. Inside us lies the legacy of many ancestors that have returned to the Spirit. I will tell you of one of them, which you might gain some illumination from.

It was in one of the rich art galleries in Holland. From out of my tiredness and disgust at the neglect of humanity arose within me the desire to view those treasures, which in a seething of greed I considered as my property; to enjoy them in an undisturbed solitude so that their finest, most secret voices might speak to me.

As the pompous watchmen, in the darkness of their misunderstanding, strode around through the halls announcing the close of the business day to the visitors, I hid right behind one of them in the darkest corner of a janitor's closet that was closed off from the public. It was filled with brushes, brooms and buckets. From between the red dust fringes I saw a tall fellow with a sailor's beard enter the hall and go straight across to where the last exhibit stood on its altar, the "Night Watch" of Rembrandt. He jingled his key ring in front of him, urging the last visitors out, indifferently rubbing his arm sleeve against the works of a rich and harmless time and spit into every second bowl which he found on his way, as if it was one of his duties. He went past my hiding place with his pointed mouth. Then I heard other watchmen coming from other directions, heard them speaking in the front hall and finally the clatter of keys sounded three times as the main entrance was locked up in a repulsive chain of noise.

I was alone and stepped out of my hiding spot onto the shore of a sea of silence which stretched forth from my feet into an infinity of directions. I went humbly among these choice spirits, conscious of my own baseness, and yet taken up in their soaring life. The pompous and popular pieces of the public hours lost their overwhelming majesty, and the unnoticed smaller masters, upon which the mark of neglect appeared, spoke in the relative twilight. I remained standing in front of an uncommonly charming little picture, which depicted the sunken Netherlands of the artist's life. Nothing in the Holland of today appeared to be saved from those times, other than the lust for eating and drinking. It was a painting, which portrayed the inventory of an art gallery, whose walls were hung with paintings, whose easels carried important canvases and there was an intentionally chaotic, kaleidoscopic charm combined with a unity and accord that bound it all together. At the time they loved to show off their riches, and assembled together in this painting appeared miniature copies of all the famous works of contemporaries or predecessors, so that it looked

like an illustrated handbook of Dutch art history. The small master of this work included a selection of various favorites that were considered the most popular and precious in their time, and between the paintings stood groups of people. The paintings were so loyally depicted, so free of affectation and also from critical consideration, that we of today would scarcely be in a position to compare their characteristics to the originals. The people chatted, laughed, and all the gestures and gazes appeared to be focused on those images or looking out from the painting itself. It was just light enough to see that the Master who had painted this painting, the one in front of me, had played a little joke.

Among the famous paintings on the main wall in the uncommonly colorful art gallery, between Rabens, Rembrandt, Van de Velde, Vermeer van Delft, Frans Hals and Jan Steen hung this very same painting as well. All the ladies and gentlemen, all the Rubens, Rembrandts and all the others, and itself, were repeated once more in miniature. I wanted to laugh, but the twilight seemed so oppressive and heavy, that my laugh vanished noiselessly and suddenly it seemed as if folds of darkness began moving to allow someone through.

A voice spoke next to me, “The joke of the master appeals to you mine Herr? Oh, at that time they loved their jokes and placed them alongside the deepest seriousness.”

A short, fat man stood next to me with his arms laid behind his back and a considerable protruding belly. His red, healthy face seemed incredibly happy to see the works of Frans Hals in this Harlem gallery. He was colorfully outfitted in a black jacket with a white collar and his nose glowed with the noble patina of Lucas Bols, founded in 1575. I was surprised at the foot stool that he so casually stepped upon with such certainty. He pointed at the painting and laid his finger on the spot where the painting of the gallery appeared for the third time.

“This appears to be the end of the series through the impossibility of further miniaturization. I tell you, mine Herr, you are wrong. There was nothing, at that time, which they would not dare to do. Through your boldness in allowing yourself to be locked in here, you have proven your zeal and love. I would like to lead you on a bit farther.”

Then he pulled a magnifying glass out of a pocket of his jacket, breathed on it and polished it with a silk cloth. As all the narrow bands of scattered light in the wide hall seemed to concentrate themselves into this glass and the sinking night was interrupted by a bright shimmering light, I called upon all the prudence I could muster. I knew that I was trying to cling to an unshakable pillar, one that was anchored in the deepest logic. In quick, circular sequences I built it up. There are technical limits to painting beyond which it is simply impossible to go any further. The finest strokes of the most undaunted brush could not be more delicate than Canaletto's smallest ornamentation, the embroidery on the vestments of priests or the engraving of the gems on their monstrance.

And with a certain confidence in the decision of my will to not let myself be fooled, I took the magnifying glass. At first I saw nothing other than huge blobs, mountains of color that adhered to the wide ditches of the canvas, swirls of red and blue in an insane rotation which suddenly resembled the spiral nebula of the hunting dog, Sirius. The drilling, sweeping forces of incalculable coincidences tore clouds of color apart from each other, threw them down onto to rough reefs and left them there to sink into the abyss of the mesh grid. But then I saw, from the summit of a high mountain, the flat surface of an image in front of me. And I knew, that it was the same repetition of the art gallery, which at this magnification appeared just as the original one did to the normal eye.

Then I lowered the hood: enough! This was a small miracle, one of those things that is not understandable, which the ancient times so dearly like to surprise us with, when we try to show ourselves as above them. But a curiosity, almost a physical compulsion, which I felt as a pressure in my neck, pulled the hood back off. I had to look inside – and was terrified.

My terror was something like the way it disturbs us, when we see a piece of our skin under strong magnification. This wrinkled, soft, jellylike substance cut with deep furrows, with the openings of the pores and the fat glands and the excretions of the shiny sweat glands with the smooth, blond, slimy hairs that looks like the image of a landscape on a planet whose ruler is disgust. Every sinking beneath the boundaries of the microscopic appears to excite nausea, which is the opposite of the upswing, which one receives when gazing on high. We measure the oversized things and are paralyzed

with fear at those things smaller than the null point of our established proportions.

As I felt these chains of knowledge rattle through me, I grabbed swaying after that anchored column of my will, in order cling to it. But then something terrible happened. The column, which I grabbed for, pushed me back, or it was as if my hands were torn loose from its smoothness – I don't know, it was the sensation of a purely physical blow or push, that threw me down an inclined plane. And sliding downward I saw the ever smaller becoming images of the gallery one after the other. They followed closely behind each other like the scenes of a theater, in which the figures of an evil dream performed a ghastly comedy of fear. The entire world was nothing more than an ever tighter becoming rectangular tunnel in which there was no going backwards, only forwards. They had pushed me into it and now I waited to take on the form of a pyramid. Paintings hung on the walls of this prison, paintings, paintings, paintings, in an endless succession, becoming smaller and smaller, until they sank into mathematical infinity. And despite that, they even still, in some inexplicable way, made the impression, that the images shown were always exact copies of the original painting repeated over and over again. The smiling Cavaliers, the curtsying Ladies, the groups in happy contemplation returned again in the same sequence in almost imperceptible reductions. It was always the same smile and the same curtsy on into infinity. The madness, the complete senselessness of this at the time caused all spatial notions of these incessant repetitions to flicker like a will-o-wisp of fear in front of me. I felt all regularities and harmonies collapse together, and while there was a whistling in my ears, my body was crushed into that horrible tunnel. My head came to a point and bored into the darkness of unconsciousness. The watchman, that found me lying on the floor of the gallery, was surprised and indignant and brought me in front of the director. After I succeeded with great difficulty in describing my strange adventures to him, he shook his head and coined the term, 'gallery illness'. Three Dutch professors of the best reputation were given the opportunity to study this unprecedented phenomenon with scientific thoroughness."

During this explanation it had become entirely light. The sun bloomed forth from between two clouds. Our friend's face was like an

antique comedy mass; between the toothless jaws the dark hole of the mouth gaped with the tusks protruding far over the great patriarch's beard. I once saw the image of a French guardsman in an illustrated war history. He was sitting down and putting a drinking mug to his mouth when his head was torn off by a shell. In its complete paralysis, which interrupted all life functions; in that moment, Richard Lionheart resembled that dead soldier. And then I saw something in the young, faded, and pale as if drained of blood, sunlight of the overflowing morning.

The hand with the pocket knife; that fearful hand, which had been playing some apparently harmless game around the edge of the gondola, during the capture of our attention, had almost completely cut through the rope which held our balloon to the earth. One strand of hemp after another released itself from its bondage with a soft snap, and only a thin strand still led to the safety of the ground. Richard Lionheart must have noticed the danger at the same time, because his paralysis was broken in a sudden explosion. He lunged at Kuperus and tried to seize him by the throat. But Eleagabal threw him back into his place with a short hand movement and then with barred fangs, gave a soundless laugh, as he pushed the electric button to signal the drawing in of the balloon.

The slow ride down happened in complete silence. The tension was at a high point where the peace of calmness had turned into a grimace. We were expecting that the rope would tear apart and the sudden jerk of the balloon would launch us into the unthinkable adventure of a death plunge. For a year we sank into the void, and the only thing that happened during this time, was the slow and inexorable rubbing of the rope on the edge of the gondola. When the spire of a tower top protruded into the solitude of our fear, we trembled. The tower point widened, then leapt into the roundness of a cupola beneath it and slid into a slender shaft across from us.

Gothic floral patterns went past . . . another tower. Then the glass roofs of the displayed palaces and finally, the entire ghost of one in the cold morning light, frozen dreams of lush splendor. We trembled more violently, and as the tree tops swam near us, Richard Lionheart tried to jump out of the gondola. Our wrestling with him sent a lurching through the gondola. Then we felt the delicious roughness of the earth. We climbed down among the workers and authorities, who forgot their grumpy sleepiness in

astonishment over our bewilderment. How we came down from outer space, almost crying in amazement at our salvation, and greeted the precious feeling of solidity. Richard Lionheart took a deep breath, and his dead eyes came alive in a fire of hatred.

But Eleagabal Kuperus laughed silently, and his tusks hung over his gray patriarch's beard.

“Prudence, my friend, prudence! Did you believe then, that this highest, most honorable and cautious company with limited liability, would rely on a simple hemp rope to ensure the integrity of this balloon? We have not yet been Americanized that much, and this old company is also happily, in possession of a security policy. Do you see this thick wire cable beneath the rolled ends of hemp? They know how to disguise complete safety with piquant charm, so that honorable family fathers can tell how they have participated in a dangerous balloon ride. Eleagabal Kuperus loved such jokes.

The Tomb at Père Lachaise

Today I moved into the dwelling from which I may not leave for an entire year. All around me are smooth, cool marble walls that are excellently crafted with no other decoration than a molding above and below, a molding that carries the winged image of the sun disk, the symbol of eternity for the Egyptians.

Even more than the quality of the craftsmanship, I am moved by the simplicity in the spirit of this sculptor like décor. It is perfection. I look at these stones that are so closely matched and joined with such extreme care. Only a master craftsman could do this.

I run my finger across one and feel the cool, smooth polished stone surface. The touch is delightful. The marble has little veins in it like delicate moss, like plants or other ocean animals encased in clumps of crystal.

When I look at these lightly scalloped, pointed and colored bands for a long time it seems as if they form curiously shaped letters under a layer of transparent ice. They lie so deeply within that the eye can scarcely make them out. It is a stiff, frozen world of impossibly delightful shapes that gives the sensation of life and movement. It is a most precious material for a tomb.

In the middle of the back wall a few spans across the floor is a bronze plaque adorned with the simple inscription “Anna Feodorowna Wassilska, died 13 March 1911”. Her coffin was lowered down into a shaft below the floor and then sealed off.

A narrow slit leads out of the marble chamber to the outside. The cemetery lies in the sunlight of an August day. Here, inside, it is cool. The air still plays a little around the entrance bringing warm waves and the scent of flowers with it. At times bees buzz past or a blue iridescent fly stays for a moment in front of the slit with buzzing wings only to suddenly draw back.

Besides the buzzing of these little lives over the graves there is a still deeper, uninterrupted sound that trembles in the air. Beyond these

barriers lies Paris. Paris, the sparkling city with its work, pleasures and passions that I must now leave behind here at Père Lachaise.

When I stepped through the entrance, scarcely the width of a man, I had arrived at the boundary of my territory. For an entire year this view of the outside world seen from the entrance of the tomb is the only one that I am allowed. It is a simple view of other graves and monuments. But I can be contented with this view. If I bend forward I can see Bartholomew's miraculous heartfelt work directly to the right.

It is the deepest, most sensitive stone memorial of a love that will not fade. I see the miserable, broken and desperate shapes that stagger even the gates of death. I see them both moving and loving through the darkness that goes beyond. They are of a man, strong, compared to the woman across from him and of the woman that shares his path in infinite trust and confidence.

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I will not be bored in my marble chamber even though I must spend an entire year in it. I sit like Hieronymus in his cage. But I hear Paris. I smell the fragrance of the flowers that bloom among the graves. I have my glimpse of great art and like Hieronymus in his cage I am well stocked with books, writing materials and paper.

In this solitude I will compose my great work. It is not a work of God like that of Hieronymus, but one of science. Here I will take my thoughts about entropy and the decay of matter which I have prepared over the last ten years and work out the details of a surprising new system of science that will bear my own name.

What is it that I really want? Haven't I already fulfilled all of my wishes? Haven't I, the poor, self-taught private student, already done the independent research to my own satisfaction? It has been possible only through love and belt tightening at the risk of starvation.

Here I will have the time to complete my work. Every interruption and disturbance will be kept away. I am permitted to speak with no one else but the servant that brings me my meals twice a day. Neither friendship nor love is permitted to me but I have no worries about my daily bread. Madame Feodorowna Wassilska provides for me. She has even had the menu for the entire week prepared and truthfully, as far as I can say on this third day of my solitude—the menu leaves nothing to be desired.

The Lady in whose tomb I sit understands something of a good meal. Why should I lie about it? I really enjoy being able to eat such good and plentiful food . . . My meals have my full attention. Every one of them is an experience to me. I have starved far too long not to appreciate a stuffed hen or pickled tongue with a wonderful Polish sauce or some other types of little Russian appetizers.

I feel completely healthy as well and know that this well-being will last the entire year of my imprisonment. Then, when the year is up I will receive from the late Madame Wassilska the small matter of two hundred thousand Francs. Two hundred thousand Francs? That means I won't need to see some whining publisher about publishing my work. Naturally the rascal would laugh out loud at me if I were a poor devil that expected him to publish a book that would threaten all of those hollow heads at the university. Now I don't need him. I can be my own publisher or hire one of them if I wanted to. Two hundred thousand Francs? That means I can travel and give lectures about my theories and carry copies of my book around everywhere that it is not in print.

It means I can pack my little Margaret into an auto and take her to the train station. The next day we can be in Marseilles with the white laughing waves of the ocean waiting for us. My poor little one, she has gone through so many troubled times with me that she has truly earned a

journey into fairytale happiness. Every day there will be sun, ocean breezes and nothing else to do except spend her time being as cozy as possible.

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This Madame Anna Feodorowna Wassilska must have been a strange piece of furniture—may my benefactor graciously forgive me—a crazy hen, much more so than we Parisians or any of her usual countrymen. I have some very definite ideas of what Madame Wassilska was like based upon a portrait of her and on the reports of her neighbors.

I think she was like a kind of Empress Katherine, full of greed for life, seizing it in all of its forms from the most refined to the most brutal. She was a rich Russian with immeasurable property somewhere on the dusty steppes and came to live here somewhere between the moors and endless grain fields of Paris. For years she oppressed her farmers and for amusement participated in little conspiracies before coming to Paris. It was here that she hoped to enjoy in full gulps the life that she at home had only been able to have drop by drop.

That is what I believe I read in her facial expression after being shown her portrait and left with it for one hour according to the provisions of her last will and testament. This was only after I had declared myself willing to fulfill the provisions of her will before the court.

Now Lady Wassilska did not present the painter any great difficulty in her choice of clothing. She was no common Lady dressed in white, red or green like you can see by the dozens everywhere. She was, so to say, a lady in nothing at all. She stood before a window completely unveiled and anyone would say that she had a beautiful body. Her head showed the austere autumn beauty of a lady in her fifties. She had sharp, cold eyes

under gorgeous arched eyebrows, a coarse Russian nose, and a full, voluptuous mouth with blood red lips that appeared to soften and slowly give way to reveal strong white teeth. She wore a cruel and cold smile—a true predator’s smile—which was more suspect than it was self-expression. The painter had shaped the hands curiously. The fingers were long and pointed. The strange way the shadows lay on them made them almost look like claws.

Oh, in viewing this portrait you could only imagine the unprecedented fortune and love madness this woman must have experienced and granted as a teenager. This portrait was a good confirmation of what her neighbors had told me about her. Naturally as soon as I was once resolved to earn the two hundred thousand Francs I inquired about her. You can’t live for an entire year in the tomb of a completely unknown person. You need to know whom you are sending your good night greetings to.

An entire assortment of strange tales had been related to me but there appeared to be even more that were not said. Perhaps that was because they were the strangest and most unbelievable, because people didn’t want to be laughed at. These good people didn’t realize how many charming or otherwise fantastic tales turned out to be true after further experiment and investigation.

Madame Wassiliska loved the fine arts as well, in her own Katherine way, as one might expect. In her estate, for example, could be found an entire collection of paintings from the period of Goya to Van Gogh. They were all placed together. Landscapes, still-lives and portraits appeared to have no appeal to her.

To this collection of paintings was joined a porcelain cabinet of similar taste consisting of nymphs, naiads, Aphrodite, Galathea and Grazien from the hands of the masters in Meissen, Nymphenburg, Vienna and Sevres.

They were arranged so the light played on the round smooth forms of delicate beloved figurines, those of gallant kings, of women whose pleasure it was to give themselves as candle holders or of goddesses that

held mirrors so ladies could make themselves beautiful for their lovers at their dressing tables.

But Madame Wassilka didn't waste her love on the arts alone. She also always had a lust for living and her needs were very active, brutal and fantastic. Like Katherine the second, men, especially young men, were drawn to her. She left her house in men's clothing to wander around on the streets searching for God knows what kind of adventure. At times she would rent the rooms of a large hotel and give splendid parties. I remember here and there hearing of those nights as half Court ball and half orgy. They left Paris stirred up for several days afterward.

Sometimes her love needs expressed themselves in cruelty. None of her girls could endure it for long. She loved sticking long needles into the flesh of her Roman chambermaids or suddenly scorching them with a glowing coal. It was truly a noble and classical taste that Parisian chambermaids could not be forced to endure and was more suited to Libyan or Persian slaves.

Just as strange was the matter of the baker's apprentice. One day Madame Wassilka saw the young baker that brought rolls to her house. He had a handsome round neck that Madame Wassilka found pleasure in. She asked the youth if he would allow her to bite him three times in the neck. A considerable number of Francs appeased his hesitation and made him agreeable but after the second bite he ran out of the house screaming, became ill, and refused to ever set foot again in the house of the Russian.

That is the portrait of my benefactor. You must admit that I have moved into the entrance hall of the last resting-place of a very interesting lady and that under these smooth hard tiles a very passionate desire has finally come to rest.

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Yesterday I began with my work. First there was an uncountable number of notes to put in order. My friends have always laughed at me because my work is as detailed as a German professor's. It is not a disgrace, I believe, to be thorough when laying the foundation from which an entirely new science will arise.

Various types of notes formed this large quantity of papers. There was white paper, on which I had written down my experiments and singular thoughts; blue paper, on which the opposing opinions of other scholars were brought in and lastly yellow, on which I refuted these opinions. Everything had to fit into each other in an orderly manner . . .

But I scarcely began my work before having a small misfortune. Yesterday evening I had the first portion of these notes completely organized and laid out on the table. Today, as I rose out of my field cot early in the morning these hundreds of notes lay strewn all over the entire floor. They were very difficult to pick up from the cold marble floor and stuck to it as if they were attracted by static electricity.

During the night a gust of wind must have blown through the entrance slit and swept all these hundreds of pages down onto the floor. Now I must start my work all over from the beginning.

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Ivan could certainly tell me more about his mistress if he only wanted to speak. But I still know absolutely nothing. He never has anything

other to say than “Good day” and “Goodbye” and he speaks these words imperfectly with a rattling voice like a parrot or an old time gramophone from the time before what we now call a phonograph.

Twice a day he appears punctually with his little wagon. The aluminum pots and pans are sunken into it and kept warm with a little system of flames. He pushes the little wagon in front of him like an Italian street vendor pushes his cart through the streets. He slowly comes up the hill, stops in front of the tomb of his mistress and sets my meal on the table. Then he sits across from me on the floor with his legs crossed in the Tartar fashion and stares at me.

It is not very pleasant having someone stare at you while you are eating. I’ve tried getting him to chat, to get around his wide-eyed gaping stare and bring some life into his features. But it is like trying to get an answer out of a fence post.

Ivan is a small fellow with bristling hair, which he tops with a Tartar cap in the summer time. If he were younger and more handsome I would say that he did it to have it fall off and make the foreign girls from Britain crazy about him. Just like the Russian students do with their pipe boots and tied up skirts to find some little sales clerk that will run around for them and do what they want.

But with Ivan this is guaranteed not to be the case. His face is a mountain range—with creases. Between pockmarks countless red pimples stand out, each with a white puss filled point in the middle. The hairs of his drooping mustache stick into his devastated skin as if they had no roots. There are no connections under them. They are like little twigs that children have stuck into a sand pile. The arrangement of these grotesque monsters is similar, only one is higher and looks as if it were awkwardly torn off and then stuck back on again.

This crusty Tartar is the only servant Madame Wassilska brought back with her from out of her homeland. He was in charge of all her other personal servants and able to endure working for his Mistress. He must know all of her customs and would be in a position to describe many of her

peculiarities to me. This Russian lady would show no restraint in front of this familiar servant.

I would gladly learn more from him about the strange provisions in the last will and testament of his Mistress. I can scarcely imagine that she had any incentive out of the goodness of her heart. It contradicts every feature of her character that she would be motivated by a higher impulse to leave any more to anyone than she had to.

There appear three possible reasons for these provisions in her last will and testament. It could simply be out of a fear of being buried alive. From time to time horrible reports appear in the newspapers of such cases. Perhaps she wanted to know that someone would be there that could hear her if she woke up once more in the narrow confines of her grave. Wait! But then she would only have needed to arrange for her tomb to be guarded immediately after her burial, not to have the applicant watch over her corpse for an entire year and not be allowed to leave the entrance.

Maybe it was out of concern for corpse robbing and body snatchers or perhaps she had once heard the case of Sergeant Bertrand. I, myself, had once seen the Sergeant's atrocities acted out at the theater.

One day while viewing the corpse of a beautiful young girl the Sergeant had suddenly been seized with the impulse to embrace her. In the night after her burial he crept into the cemetery, tore up the fresh grave and rolled around with the dead girl. The atrocious lust and satisfaction from this desecration was so great that from that time on Bertrand would roam around cemeteries at night searching for corpses.

A year later in a court trial he was accused of digging up twelve to fifteen corpses in one night before finding a dead woman to throw himself upon, to kiss, to mutilate and bite to pieces. This monster was extraordinarily clever, almost incomprehensible and perpetuated his handiwork for a long time despite all safe guards and precautions. He was finally wounded by a hellish contraption while climbing over a cemetery wall and captured.

It could be that Madame Wassilka thought the idea of falling into the hands of such a beast was too embarrassing.

But there is still a third possibility and to me it appears to be the one best suited to the nature of this Asian tyrant. Perhaps she had these two hundred thousand Francs set out only for the purpose of anticipating with pleasure the torment, fear and horror the applicant would feel at being kept spell bound in a cemetery for so long and how it would wear on a person. Now if that was Madame Anna Feodorowna Wassilka's real intention she will be thoroughly disappointed. I eat like a tiger and sleep like a rat.

It is late. I have drunken a bottle of burgundy and am in a good mood. I must take leave of my benefactor. I rise up, take a bow and knock on the bronze plaque with a curled finger.

“Good night Anna Feodorowna, good night!”

The entire tomb reverberated with the ringing of the bronze plaque, “Good night!”

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For the second time the same misfortune. My papers, which I had completely organized and laid out on the table, are once more strewn over the entire floor. I must not forget to put them into some other location or burden them with a heavy weight.

Today I have seen perfectly how they were sent whirling to the floor by a draft. I woke up in the middle of the night out of the deepest sleep as if my nerves had been given a signal from an attached electrical battery. It is

inexplicable, but my entire inner attention, the very core of my being, hangs on this work, is judged on it and feels it as a component of itself. While I slept this attention was still awake. The premonition of danger to my work interrupted my good sleep.

I awoke and saw my marble chamber flooded with a moderate light. It was not moonlight from outside. This brightness appeared to be the reflection from the many marble tombstones that had somehow combined and penetrated into the chamber in such a way that the stones around me glowed. It was the first time I had seen such illumination and it somehow reminded me of the phosphorescent lights of the ocean or as if the stones had absorbed the light of the sun during the day and were now giving it back again in a soft glow.

I sat up in my cot. The chamber was so ablaze with this light that I could make out the objects of my study. The uncommon phenomenon suggested an entirely new line of research into how matter was formed. Did it originate out of this mysterious radiation?

At that moment I noticed a black four-cornered hole on the back wall of the tomb at the place where the bronze plaque was embedded. It looked as if someone had removed the plaque. At the same moment a soft breath of air swept over me that brought with it the scent of withered flowers and extinguished candles. It was a smell that I had at times noticed before. This breeze went from the entrance of my tomb toward the back wall or from there to the entrance and I saw how it seized my papers that were lying flat on the table and whirled them to the floor.

Half terrified and half furious I sprang out of my bed to save the rest of my work. The papers appeared to cling once more to the marble floor and as I pulled on them I noticed the stones were moist and sticky as if covered with a layer of some congealing substance that gradually released the papers. I gathered them together with difficulty.

That was when the bronze plate first occurred to me again but when I looked it was there back in its place. A soft light radiated from it so that I could even read the name of the deceased perfectly. An immense excitement

seized me. I saw a new puzzle placed before me, a new discovery into the most mysterious of all forces, light.

I was certain that this phenomenon dealt with a new species of light, perhaps some type of radiation like x-rays that penetrated through metal and under certain conditions, under a specific angle of refraction had the power to make things disappear. When I had looked out from my bed the bronze plate was gone. I sat back down on the bed again but now it remained in its place. I was wrong then and must have missed what really happened.

I got very little sleep that night. I kept going through the various methods of light investigation to determine which would work best in this case. It was only in the early morning dawn as the strange radiation slowly dwindled before the day that I finally found some rest.

Curious bystanders went back and forth or stood outside attempting to see me. I could only imagine what the newspapers had written about me. The Parisian could not imagine that anyone would remain in one spot for an entire year of their own free will. Some simply laughed at me as a fool. They stood outside and grinned. Others shook their heads at me, filled with compassion and melancholy.

Oh if these sad Parisians only knew that what I feared more than death was boredom! If they only knew what I experienced, how the thoughts of my work have not once given me peace at night. A short journalist with a notebook and pencil attempted to pull information from me. He tried to talk me into giving up my two hundred thousand Francs just so he could have a spicy story to deliver. (By the way, I really would like to know what the newspapers are writing about me, whether they portray me as a hero or as an idiot. All I need to do is tell Ivan to bring me a newspaper. But I have sworn that I will only take of the outside world what can be seen from the entrance to Père Lachaise. Nothing of the outside world shall divert me from my work. My short journalist will depict me honestly. I've made it clear to him through gestures that I must remain quiet and stay inside here behind the door and the slit in the marble wall.

Another visitor has me irritated and stirred up. Margaret was there. She didn't dare come up herself, but I saw her black hat with the yellow tea

roses in the distance between the burial mounds. When it began to rain a troop of people came back from a burial and walked past my dwelling. They stood there, pressing themselves against each other and staring in at me. There was a black haired clod with a glistening wet umbrella; someone made a joke, a couple made faces at me. Then suddenly I saw, only for a moment, between two wet umbrellas, under a thin rain veil, Margaret's large hat and her sad pale face beneath it . . .

“You are the best! It is all for you, Margaret, that I sit inside here, all for you!”

I have no doubt any more that intermolecular forces are at work in the marble of this tomb that are contrary to known science. I've written down my nightly observations. As soon as complete darkness falls, sometime towards the middle of the night, a mysterious light, a strange greenish glow appears to radiate out of the stone. I'm inclined to think that it is a special type of marble that absorbs light during the day and gives it off again as a phosphorescent glow at night.

On the other hand the structure of the marble itself appears to be different under the influence of this radiation. This is an impression I've had twice now and it always repeats itself. The outer layer of the marble appears to become soft; turns into a viscous jelly like substance. At the same time in the uncertain light the images and veins in the stone, the ferns, moss, starfish and coral branches seem to float in a fluid and crawl closer to the surface. When I walk over the marble blocks of the floor it is like stepping on a soft carpet. When I touch the walls the impression of my fingers stays behind.

What a strange and fortunate coincidence that that I am just beginning a foundational work on the decay of matter and entropy. This phenomenon that I am just learning about is closely related to that theme and will undoubtedly provide essential support for my theory after I have closely examined it. I am determined to do this.

Without a doubt the appearance of this light and the structural changes of the marble stand in close association with each other and they

must derive from the elementary laws of matter and all other known types of radiation.

I will require some apparatus for my experiments. I've given Ivan a list and appointed him to procure them for me. He just looked at me without comprehending and grinned scornfully. Poor devil, his Asian skull has no concept of the wonderful elation that researchers and discoverers feel.

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I'm beginning to get fat. Truthfully it is very ridiculous but I must reluctantly accept the responsibility for it—if I don't want to lie to myself. I'm beginning to get fat. My starving body has consumed the meals with such greed that it is becoming groggy. For some time now I've noticed my poor hands. These bundles of sinews and veins have altered their appearance. There are no depressions between the tendons any more. My veins lay embedded in fat and my fingers have become round. My gaunt legs have filled out my trousers and the tips of my knees have become round and soft when I am sitting, like the cupola of a cathedral, or like those of an invalid. There is a very real and unaccustomed clumsiness when I walk around on them.

But today I've received unambiguous proof of just how fat I've become. I was bent over my work completely forgetting my entire surroundings and myself. Suddenly in the middle of a sentence I felt compelled to put down my quill and look outside. I saw a piece of blue sky and the cemetery in the wonderful autumn sunshine. Orange colored linden leaves slowly blew past the slit in the tomb. It was early in the day. The thin threads of old woman summer were now covered over and all of the graves were sparkling with dewdrops. A wild yearning fell over me to see Bartholomew's tomb in this cool morning light, to relish the shapes in this

rich sunlight and experience the happy feeling that goes with admiring such a great work of art.

I got up and stood by the entrance, bent forward and tried to see the monument. But it didn't work. My fat, bloated body filled up the narrow slit, got stuck in it like in a trap and only by pulling against the side walls with all my strength was I able to back out and free myself. I must take responsibility for the ridiculous fact that I am a prisoner. I, the scrawny unfortunate one have become a prisoner of my belly. My gluttony has deprived me of the consolation and happiness of great art.

It is no wonder. I eat like a farm hand and don't move around. But that will all be different. From now on I will eat normally and go jogging around my table every day. What good would it do if I got even bigger and at the end of a year couldn't leave the tomb with my well-earned two hundred thousand Francs? I'm going to begin with my abstinence today.

Oh ridiculous tragicomedy, this gluttony! What has come out of my beautiful intention? I held it firmly in my soul and drove in deeply in with hammer blows of my will, right next to my other great resolutions, next to my belief in my work and in myself. Then, as I saw Ivan coming between the graves with his little cart on the sand strewn path I struggled to keep my resolution and my will firmly in place.

When a bowl of tempting ragout was placed in front of me I saw my fat round face in the smooth polished silver of the saucer and renewed my intention.

"No," I said and pushed the dish away from me. "Today all I want is some bouillon and a white bread."

Ivan looked at me and his grin as well the look he gave me in which he appeared to measure my circumference showed that he did understand me. He quietly pulled back the bowl of ragout enriched with mussels and placed a bowl of bouillon from his cart onto the table. As soon as he set the beautiful brown brew in front of me its aroma was so wonderful that my resolve wavered. Just as the steam from a laundry eventually penetrates the strongest masonry and destroys it, this delightful aroma destroyed my

resolve, only it didn't take as long. It only took a few breaths. After I had taken the first swallow an immense craving for food swept over me. My belly screamed for food as if I had already gone for fourteen days without eating. My intestines cramped together and I threw all considerations aside.

Ivan had stepped outside and acted as if he had prepared the food himself. He uncovered the pots and dishes in his cart showing me the white flesh of the poultry, the brown crusts of the brats, the colorful mix of Italian salad, the yellow-white creamy filling of a torte. I stood up, reached over the table and pulled the bowl of ragout toward me.

“Ivan,” I said. “Bring everything, bring it. I've recovered my appetite.”

In a moment I once more saw my face in the mirror of the platter. My teeth were bared, my eyes rolled around fearfully and my entire features were distorted by greed. I looked like an animal protecting his food. Not anything remained of the entire meal. I consumed the ragout together with the brats and ate half a turkey. I had to force myself to set the bones aside and not gnaw on them like a gluttonous hound.

I must say that the cook who prepared these meals for Madame Wassilska is truly an artist at his trade. I don't believe it is possible to cook better than this man. Every meal is complete in itself and the meals are so balanced that a taste of one thing compels one to eat it all. It is impossible to resist a meal that is produced with such refinement. They are equally charming to the eye, the nose and the gums. I bless this great-unknown artist—and I curse him. It begins to look as if I may never leave this tomb. If this goes on I will become—fattened.

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With that and with George Rudorf's confirming explanation of light as the original source of matter the old opinion of the atom fell, that it swam in the world aether like wood in water and was actually foreign to it. Now here I stand on the foundation of my own system. The atom forms itself out of the aether. It is like a hurricane in the aether, a cyclone that condenses and solidifies. It originates out of the inconceivably swift movements of the aether particles that now rotate in space instead of going in a straight line.

And how does this world aether itself originate? This is where the greatest wonder of the physical comes together with the metaphysical. Here Poincaré himself describes the transformation of movement into substance!

The world aether is simply the passage of energy in the material world. Energy is not a property of matter; it is instead the earlier pre-existing substance out of which matter comes. Thus the solution to the decay of matter is solved as well, that puzzle which so disturbs our physicists. Matter must decay in order to once more become pure energy.

The law of the preservation of energy is true, but it begins well before the birth of matter. A cycle of energy waves is produced out of which matter is first created. That is why the world aether is material and immaterial at the same time. It is both element and energy. It is the carrier of all phenomena in the visible world but even though it will take on all properties it has no properties of its own. That is why this self-luminous aether in my marble house displays none of the properties of light.

Still, I am filled with dismay because the more I observe them; the more they display properties that I can find no explanation for. I'm thinking of the disappearance of the bronze plaque on the back wall of the tomb. This phenomenon occurs very suddenly and it reappears again just as suddenly. It happens so fast that I cannot legitimately observe it.

In the middle of the night from my bed I see that the bronze plaque is gone. I get up, walk over and try to feel the metal. It is really gone. It has been removed without a trace left behind and after awhile the bronze plaque is back in its place once more.

I need to add that an unpleasant feeling of anxiety, difficulty breathing and a desperate beating of my heart falls over me with this disappearance. When it reappears these sensations are gone. I've already spoken about the structural changes of the marble and so, in conclusion, I must admit once more that I am not as clever as I thought I was. The incompatible properties of this radiation confound me. I am at the end of my confidence and once more in doubt that it really is the world aether that fills my dwelling at night with a green light.

But if it is not the world aether, then what is it?

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I have received an answer to my question. Under the last sentence of the notes I had written down in the early morning dawn before falling asleep exhausted there was something else written down and added to it. After my closing question was added:

“It is the breath of the katechana.”

Who is the katechana? What is it? This answer to my question gives me a new mystery and who has written it? That is perhaps the strangest of all the peculiarities that surround me. At first glance it appears to be my own handwriting. It has all the characteristic features of my own strokes, the broken line in the “k”, the long stroke in the “a”. But you only need to examine it closely and critically to see that it is only an attempt to copy my handwriting. It has a perplexing foreign feel to it that does not belong to me. But who else is there in here that can play this joke on me?

The only possible answer which I must accept is that I was up walking in my sleep and wrote down this mysterious answer myself and

this abnormal condition of my brain altered some of my handwriting. But where did I get this word, katechana? I don't know what it means at all. Could it have come out of a dream, out of the abyss of the unconscious, from which no ray of consciousness can intrude?

I have never noticed any inclination for sleep walking. This body of mine has never before played any pranks on me other than the paroxysms of hunger that have deceptively drawn me away from the steep mountain path of my research.

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Anyway, it is not out of the question that I have fallen into a pathological condition of consciousness. I must admit that my body and my spirit now find themselves in a strange conflict. I am tormented by this sinister gluttony. I renew my intentions daily only to be unfaithful to them and become even fatter. My spirit appears to be weakening.

I have begun a new line of thought to explain this mysterious answer which I have received. While it is correct in general, I find the individual points crude and inadequate. They lack the sharpness that my work has shown up to this time and must be influenced in some way by my unknown enemy. Even though I clearly recognize these blunders and mistakes I make no effort to correct them. I don't know how to begin.

More important than any of these questions is that of the breath of the katechana. Now it appears to me that this word really is the explanation for all that has happened. I am convinced that everything will become better when I find the answer to it. I will win back my clarity and overcome this sickening gluttony, this animal impulse to fill my belly. The battle against this insatiable hunger is exhausting me. When I am finally sated I feel such

shame and disgust at my lack of will that I want to lacerate my bloated features and crush my white, soft, fat cushioned hands that are so compelled to push food into my mouth.

I have never known a tomcat that could be enticed in such a way to eat so I must then be a goose that is being fattened. Fattened! It seems that I am supposed to become fat. But for what purpose?

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Today I have overslept for the first time. I wanted to begin work yesterday evening like always but my thoughts were confused and entangled more than ever. Yesterday was All Soul's Day. An immense crowd of people filled the cemetery from the first morning hours until dusk. Paris had burst open and people were everywhere seeking out the graves of their departed and praying for their dead. Wreathes, flowers and candles were everywhere. The buzz of all the people lay like a murmuring cloud over the graves.

Almost all day long groups of people stood in front of my marble house. The first visitors were two women clothed in black that led a little girl between them. Perhaps they were wife and mother of one of the deceased. The child looked at me with large fearful eyes.

"Mama," she said. "Is that the man that must stay in there for a year?"

The women pulled the little one away. They felt it was intrusive to be staring at me. After fifteen steps the little girl had forgotten me and everything else in the cemetery. She was hanging on the arms of the

women, pulling her legs up and allowing herself to be suspended and carried like a little angel for a ways.

Not all the visitors were as considerate as these women were. Several of them made attempts to draw me into conversation. The sky alternated between rain clouds and sunshine. I only have a general impression of the day, groups of people now in the light, now in the shadows. At last I finally turned my back to the entrance of the tomb.

Toward evening it was very quiet. Ivan brought me the evening meal and while I sat there slinging it down someone else stepped into the door slit.

“Mein Herr,” he said. “Excuse me!”

It was a young man with a fresh face. He appeared to be a craftsman, salesman or something similar.

“Mein Herr,” he repeated. “Don’t stay here any longer . . . I advise you to leave the money, she bit me twice in the throat . . .”

At that Ivan leapt forward like a wild animal. I have never seen him like that. The unkempt mustache hairs appeared to stand on end. He raised his fist and shook it at the young man who ducked his head down between his shoulders, mumbled something and moved off into the dusk frightened away. It became quiet once more in the cemetery.

“Who was that?” I asked.

Ivan grinned.

“I don’t know,” he said in his wearisome, rattling voice.

But I knew—It was the baker’s apprentice, Madame Wassiliska’s apprentice baker that she had bitten in the throat . . . I was tired from the constant exertion of will that it took to put up with the gaping crowd all day long and slept like a dead man.

I awoke in suspense with a feeling of uneasiness inside . . . I felt something on my right lower arm and on my throat. My glance fell on a little dried crust of blood above my left wrist. It sat on the edge of a little wound. There were a series of them. It looked as if I had been bitten there. Bitten . . . I can find no better word for this type of wound and the skin surrounding it was white colored and flabby, a saucer sized bloodless spot that looked as if it had been covered over night with a poultice. I grabbed at my throat and found a similar wound there.

I try not to think about whom could have inflicted these wounds on me. Could it have been a Sergeant Bertrand imitator? Could there really be such people with such bestial lusts, which they cannot repress? Do they go wandering around cemeteries at night mangling corpses and perhaps falling onto sleeping victims?

The nights have become very cool. From now on I will solidly shut the door of my dwelling. Soon I will need to bring a stove in here if I don't want to become ill in this marble prison. I asked Ivan what precautions he had in mind for the winter. He looked at me as if he didn't understand me.

Some dark voice told me to hide my wounds from him so I wore a high collar and pulled the cuff of my sleeve down over my wrist. The gaze of the Russian was embarrassing. It seemed as if he was painstakingly examining every part of my body. I felt as if I had a secret infirmity.

“I need a stove,” I said furiously. “A stove. Do you understand me?”

He nodded.

Suddenly something occurred to me.

“Listen Ivan,” I said. “Why haven't you tried to earn these two hundred thousand Francs? You could have. It was open to anyone. Why didn't you apply?”

Then for the first time I saw this taciturn, grouchy person, this machine, seized by some inner force. His features contorted themselves into a grimace of horror. His crippled hands with their bent fingers stretched out in front of him and like a scared parrot he shrieked, he rattled, “No . . . no!”.

I don't know why I was likewise gripped with terror at this "No", why I suddenly trembled, why such fear fell over me as if I had been drenched with boiling hot and ice cold water at the same time.

I grabbed at a wineglass in order to get control over this panic. My cuff raised, pulled itself up and Ivan's glance fell on the wound above my wrist. The horror yielded and then melted away from his face making room for a grin that stuck there between the pussy pimples.

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Margaret was there. She stood between the marble walls of the entrance. Her large hat with the yellow roses appeared to tower over the barren treetops. Her eyes were full of tears that slid down over her pale cheeks. She stood there like an envoy of the living, of temptation. It was as if Paris, the city whose sounds I constantly heard, had sent her to me and I had to obey. This battle of love lasted almost an hour.

"Ernest," she said. "I beg you . . . Come out of there. Don't you love me any more? I've let you have your way . . . I wanted you to believe that I was as strong as you were but I can't stand your being here any more. Let me take you away from here . . . Oh, Ernest, look at you! What nonsense to sacrifice your health and your life just for some money.

Weren't we happier, both of us, when we didn't know how we were going to pay for the next meal? Remember that evening in my room and our stroll in Fontainbleau, the large bill we had and how we sneaked out without paying? How we didn't have five Sous . . . If you love me, come out here."

I stood three steps away, held myself back with both hands gripping the edge of the table. A thousand words of love lay on my lips. A thousand affirmations of my yearning and tenderness forced their way out of my heart. But I was not permitted to speak if I wanted to win my prize honestly. I could only allow my eyes to speak.

But how could my eyes say what was really important, why I couldn't leave, that I did not want my time here to be in vain, that I was absolutely resolved to win the money, that the real reason I couldn't go out was because I was a prisoner of my own body. Most of all, that I was determined to unravel the mystery of this tomb and the breath of the katechana! It was very difficult.

Margaret cried, "Oh, you don't know what the newspapers write about you . . . What your friends say . . . You sent a short report about your observations to the university . . ."

So, they speak and write about the preliminary report that I sent regarding the mysterious light I have seen during my imprisonment. Now, they would like to say, what they want to say, is that I have gone crazy . . . As if I cared.

"Is that what you want? Do you want what the people are saying to become real? Oh how I love you Ernest. How I love you . . . I can not bear it any longer."

I felt that I would become weak and waved her away with both hands. I turned my back on her and stood that way until her shadow was gone from the marble floor, until her sobs receded among the graves.

But she, the faithful, the good, the best love a man ever had, came again in the night. She braved the terror of the graveyard from which she had formerly trembled like a little child. Who else could it have been other than Margaret?

I awoke that night out of the dull sleep into which I now always fell, and felt that I was not alone. Someone was with me, had thrown themselves on top of me and kissed me so painfully that it was like a bite. In the green glow I saw a woman. I felt her . . . I returned her kisses without speaking a

word . . . I was not permitted to speak and Margaret pressed herself against me with all the force of yearning and despair.

Margaret, who else could it have been? My entire body is covered with wounds . . . with bite wounds, the traces of her wild kisses. I stagger around powerless. My flesh seems bloodless . . . my muscles are asleep and spongy under the withered skin. And the wounds don't heal . . . They have become atrociously scarred, become pussy pimples. And Margaret comes every night . . . every night.

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Ivan has spoken. I know what the katechana is. I have torn it out of him. I saw it in his eyes, in his insidious gaze with which he observed my wounds, appeared to count them and appraise them. He knew what they were. I had seen this testing, appraising look before in the boxing ring when both battered and bloody opponents paused before going in for the knock-out punch.

Once it was entirely clear to me that Ivan knew what they were, what the katechana was, I moved toward him. I still see how he backed away from me, how he pressed himself into a corner, how I seized him by the throat. I stood in front of him.

“Who is the katechana,” I asked.

That's when I saw his fear return despite the scornful cheekiness he had treated me with for so long. He blinked at me insidiously, but now I knew that he was going to tell the truth.

“That's what she called herself,” he rattled.

“Who?”

“She learned it in Crete. For a half a year she lived at the abyss of Lenka Vrune and I had to bring her sheep which she mutilated.”

“What does katechana mean?”

“It means the same as . . . In Albania it is called Wurwolak, in Bulgaria, Lipir. The Czech call it Mura, the Greeks in the ruins of Sparta call it Bourkolak and the Portuguese call it Bruxa. It has been known by all these people.”

“These are just names, you miserable . . . What does it mean? I want to know . . .”

“It means one that can never have enough of blood and the sacrifice of manhood. One that lives beyond death . . .”

I let go of him. I knew enough. I was being fattened inside this marble prison—I was being fattened for a vampire . . . My flabby, distended body was only a container for its blood. My blood vessels had to become distended so the juice could be taken out of them, for the vampire that came every night and drank till it was sated.

And in some mysterious way my manhood is stirred up and torn out by these criminally spiced meals. She drinks away my strength. She sucks my life in and the more I give her the stronger and more real the skin of this vampire becomes. The shape that in the beginning appeared as light and playful as a cloud in the last few nights has become a heavy body weight upon me . . .

Her breath penetrates through the stone and envelops me in a green glow. It disintegrates the marble . . . or it could be that the marble only appears to transform. Maybe it is only because my entire body is so drunk from her breath, because my muscles, nerves, senses and my brain are so fully saturated with this glowing poison of decay . . .

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Now that I know everything I am once more completely at peace. Now I know at last why I have not been completely myself and why I have been staggering around in a drugged condition. But now I have my courage once again. I am resolved not to yield now that I know the enemy I must be prepared for. I am resolved to win my two hundred Francs, to win against the katechana and all the terrors of the grave . . . If she is able to have a physical body it must also fall under physical laws. If she can win to life she can still die a second time . . .

I will tear up this cocoon that has been spun around me. Yes, a cocoon, in the literal sense of the word. When I was down and vulnerable she wove a net around me that made me want to stay here in order to win my two hundred thousand Francs, that made me a prisoner in this marble house. She has most certainly spun a web around me because I can't go out any more.

My legs are hindered at every movement. With every step I push against an elastic thread that only slowly gives way with a resounding clang. Every movement of my hands is difficult when I try to raise these threads and push them to the side . . . They give way only to a hard pull . . . They scurry incessantly over my face like the fabric of a spider web, like when you walk on some wooded path in the summer time. Only these threads are of an invisible metal. I hear them clang. The sound of them always rings in my ears when they finally snap. Oh, I will tear this web apart . . . before it becomes too solid . . . Tonight? It is time. I will be free. The katechana will not torment me any more. I will get my two hundred thousand Francs from her. I will be the winner.

Tonight I lie in wait, alert like I have never been before in my life. The buzz of the city down below becomes fainter. I have left the door open despite the autumn chill in order to hear this buzz. It tells me of life, of the

life I will plunge back into with my two hundred thousand Francs. The reflections of many lights shine from the night clouds. They blink back and forth brightly in a regular pattern. They are the flashes of an electric billboard that advertises a bathtub, a theater performance or a pleasure cruise . . . I wait patiently.

Around midnight the green glow in my prison becomes stronger. I look across at the bronze plaque with the name Anna Feodorowna Wassilska . . . But I breathe peacefully as if I am asleep . . . Now the bronze plaque is slowly dissolving in the green glow. It becomes thinner, as billows of faint red mist appear here and there in the green light. Now the last of it fades, disappears leaving a gaping four cornered black hole in the marble.

Then a breeze presses out of it once more, a mist like breath on cold winter days. It forms itself into a ball, becomes thicker, takes on form and once more someone is standing beside my bed . . .

I see the eyes of Madame Wassilska, her coarse nose, her full mouth and blood red lips that slowly give way to strong, white, pointed teeth . . . I recognize every feature from the portrait that I have been shown.

She bends over me, kisses me . . . I wrap my hands around her throat, feel my nails press into her flesh. It is flesh that I feel . . . She gasps, beats at me and pushes with her arms against my chest . . . but I hold onto her and don't let go. I fall from my bed and we roll onto the floor . . . always with my hands on her throat. I sense the convulsions of her body. Oh, it is a body built out of my blood, but it is like the body of a living person . . . I hang onto her like a hound, my teeth seize her throat . . . her movements become weaker . . . lessen . . . finally she offers no more resistance . . . But I want to be certain that I have really won. Blood fills my mouth. Ah, yes, it is only my own blood that I am drinking back.

She lies for a long time entirely still. I get up . . . A sweet taste fills my mouth, my lips stick lightly together, my hands are covered with blood, my own blood that I have won back. She lays stretched out on the floor—the katechana, and now my marble house is dark. The breath of the katechana is gone. I sit through the entire night without making a light. But inside myself there is a light, I am free.

The late autumn morning dawns gray and gloomy. The katechana lies stretched out on the floor with her throat bitten through. She is dead a second time, this Madame Wassilska. I look at her face. I pull back. Oh, she wanted to give me one last fright before she yielded to me. She has taken on the features of Margaret. She wants me to believe that I have killed Margaret . . . I push the shell away from me with my foot. Ivan will be surprised.

The day breaks.

I am free . . .

The Wicked Nun

One night I suddenly awoke out of a deep sleep. My first thought was a certain surprise that I had woken up at all; because I had spent the entire day in the ruins of the old Jesuit barracks and was very tired. I turned over onto my other side and tried to fall back to sleep, but then I heard a scream, a scream that scared all sleep away from me. It was a scream of terror, and in that moment I sat up straight in bed.

At first I tried to get my directions straight. Often at nights I don't know where the door is or the window and have to search for them. I finally remembered that there was only one way that I could sleep, with my bed facing north to south, and then I knew that the door was on my right and the window was on the left.

In bed to my right my wife slept in a peaceful, contented, childlike sleep. After a while, which I spent tensely listening, I lay back down, convinced that it must have been a dream. This dream must have been strangely powerful and wild to have those screams resound so loudly in the twilight of my consciousness. It was only after two hours that I was able to fall asleep again.

During the day I couldn't keep my mind on my work. My thoughts were constantly preoccupied with my dream and I wanted to indulge in them undisturbed. I climbed around among the ruins of the Jesuit barracks. I had to manage and supervise the demolition. The sun was relentless and the dust of the broken masonry wrapped around me and got into my lungs.

Punctually at eleven o'clock, as every day, Dr. Holzbock, the head of the provincial archives, found his way over to me and inquired after the progress of the work. He was extremely interested in the destruction of the ancient building, which in its oldest parts almost dated back to the founding of the city. Since he had made the history of this country his study, he hoped to find many clues in the dissection of this august body.

We stood in the great court and watched as the workers tore down the first floor of the main wing.

“I am convinced,” he said, “that we still have many special discoveries to find after we get down to the level of the foundations. On the testimony of the past, physical gravity has pulled many powerful works to the ground. I cannot tell you how much such a building attracts me; one with such a rich history as this one. At first it was a merchant’s court, then a nun’s cloister, then a fortification and finally a barracks for Jesuits.

A relatively large part of the old foundation appears to have touched the surrounding walls of the old city, and may have taken in and left traces of that life behind. These layers of deposits, which cover one another, proclaim traces of each time period in a geological history for us. I believe that there are still strange things to discover in this old masonry—not just pots with old coins and whitewashed frescoes, but also petrified adventure and fossilized fate.”

Thus said the fanatical archivist, and across from us the team of workers exposed a tip of solid masonry. An archway was revealed there, and I imagined the many processions of merchants, nuns and Jesuits, who had spent one part of their lives under the oppressive grayness of this passageway. While Doctor Holzbock continued his rhapsody I was seized with the irresistible, romantic temptation to visit the ruins some night. I wanted the charm and thrill of the uncanny to work its effect on me and to make friends with the spirits of this place.

That night I awoke out of a sound sleep, exactly as I had done the previous night, and shortly after that heard the fearful scream. I had been listening for it and strained to determine exactly where it came from. Yet at the decisive moment, I was seized by such an inexplicable fear, that I couldn’t tell exactly if it came from inside our house or from out on the street. Shortly afterwards, I believed that I heard the loud steps of men coming from the street. I lay in an uncomfortable half sleep till morning; in which I occupied myself with the puzzle of this scream. When I spoke of these things to my wife at breakfast, she laughed at first.

But then she said worriedly, "I believe that you have become more nervous since you have been so preoccupied with the old Jesuit barracks. Take some leave and let one of your colleagues take your place. You are overtired and have an obligation to your health."

But I didn't want to hear anything about it because digging in the rubble of the old building and searching for the things that the archivist expected to find had become my passion. I gave into my wife only this much; I promised her that I would wake her up if I woke again in the middle of the night.

That night I once again woke out of a sound sleep. Hastily and fearfully I shook my wife awake, and we sat upright next to each other in bed. Then the scream came once more, shrill and very clear—from the street.

"There, there, do you hear that?"

But my wife lit the lamp and looked at my face.

"My God! How you look! It is nothing. I don't hear anything at all."

I was so beside myself that I screamed at her, "Hush . . . there . . . now there is running down below on the street."

"You are hurting me," cried my wife, as I squeezed her arm, as if to convince her by force.

"Didn't you hear it?"—

"I didn't hear anything, nothing at all!"

I sank back into the cushions covered with sweat, exhausted, like after strenuous physical work and was unable to give understandable answers to the concerned questions of my wife. Around morning, when she was once more asleep, I became clear about what I had to do to satisfy her. With completely serene and calm behavior during the day I succeeded in convincing my wife that I had calmed down. During the evening meal I joked about my nightly hallucinations and promised her that I would sleep

until morning the next day and to not trouble myself any further over the scream, or other tumult on the street. At the same time I promised her that immediately on completion of this very special and responsible work I would take a long vacation.

But I had scarcely heard the deep breathing of my wife indicating she had fallen asleep, when I got up and got dressed again. In order to ensure that no unreasonable thoughts would enter my head, I took up Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" and attempted to submerge myself in its strict and logical presentations. But around midnight a disquiet and unrest came over me that made me incapable of reading any more. It was impossible to follow the iron force of the book. A stronger force pulled me away from it.

I quietly got up and went out of the house. By my growing trembling I knew that the time had come. I pressed into the recess of the house entrance, summoned all of my courage and waited. I was determined to find the natural cause of my nightly torments and put a quick end to them. A gas street lamp burned twenty steps away and gave enough light for the section of the street in front of my house. A young man, who had apparently drunken too much, came up the other side of the street to a house. He stood there standing and after several failed attempts, finally unlocked the door. I listened to the sound of his return home as he crossed the main floor and began to climb the stairs. Then everything was quiet again.

Suddenly a scream flared up in the stillness. I staggered back into the deep shadows and reached for the door knob, whose cold metal I could feel perfectly in my hand. Desperate and beside myself with fear, I wanted to flee. But even though I had not locked the front door I could not open it. Then I heard the rushing steps of many people on the street and something flew past me. I could not recognize whether it was just a shadow or a human. It did not seem to possess the weight of a human as it passed; but it gave the distinct impression of physicality; of a woman in a frantic run up the street; a woman in a long flowing gown which she lifted up in order to run better. And several steps behind her came an entire crowd of men in strange garb that was foreign to our time. With them the experience was also repeated as of shadows gliding past, but still giving the impression of physicality.

I don't know what madness possessed me and forced me to run behind them. It may have been the madness of the slaughter that is stronger than fear and causes soldiers to throw themselves into enemy fire. I never ran before like I did then. It was not like a run; but more like a gliding and floating, as if I were in a dream. I never lost sight of the chase in front of me, the woman ahead and the crowd of men behind. It seemed to me that I had run for a long time and yet I felt no sign of fatigue.

Suddenly the woman disappeared; I still saw the chaotic back and forth movements of the pursuing men and then everything disappeared into the shadows of the night.

To my surprise, I stood in front of the wooden fence that surrounded the ruins of the Jesuit barracks. There was a sign over the entrance that read: "This site is banned to nonemployees!"

I tore open the gate and stormed in. The night watchman stood there very close to the entrance, leaning against a support, and greeted me as I appeared so suddenly before him. Proud that my sudden appearance had found him at his post, he pulled himself together and tried to announce his presence. But I did not let him say a single word.

"Have you seen a woman? She was wearing a long gray gown that she was holding up high and she just ran in here!"

"I have seen nothing Herr Architect, nothing at all."

"By the devil, she could not have melted into the air. Have you been sleeping? Sleeping with your eyes open?"

The watchman was very upset about my suspicions and asserted emphatically that he had not been sleeping, and that he still had not seen anything. Then I began looking around for myself. I crawled around everywhere, looked into all the corners of the courtyard; the many rooms and crannies which were lit by the reflection of the city lights on the jagged broken walls overhead. I dared to cross dangerous remnants of masonry which threatened to collapse at any moment in order to look into the most otherwise inaccessible chambers.

Then I ran further along the half open gallery and the glow of the lanterns played strange shadow games on the dirty paintings. The church, which had been completely enclosed by the old building so that only the roof and tower rose high above the gray walls, was now laid bare for the greatest part, and there were a crowd of hiding places. But I didn't find anything there either and went back home with a heavy head and trembling knees; all the while thinking about what I had seen and putting every possible interpretation on it, but just getting more confused than ever.

“Hopefully you didn't hear anything last night,” said my wife the next morning.

“No—I slept soundly,” I lied and quickly stuck my face in the water basin so my wife would not discover the signs of the night on my features.

That day we made a discovery in the rubble field that highly delighted the archivist. It was the excavation of a beautiful old portal, whose elaborate artwork had been done with such care in the past that he wanted to set it back up again as a memorial in a different place. Over two pillars, which were richly decorated with flowers and fruit, curved a beautiful arch over the entrance. On the ledge above this portal stood statues of the saints in the style of the 17th century, saints that held their symbols out in front of them like hieroglyphs of their fates. As they tried to lift St. James from his pedestal, his head fell from his neck, rolled a few paces further and remained lying in the rubble. You could see a round cylindrical recess at the base of the head; as if an iron bar had once been fastened to it and when they picked up the rest of the statue you could see that the recess continued into the cavity of the statue as well.

At first I reproached the workmen for their carelessness, but Dr. Holzbock, who had lifted the head and was looking at it very intently, interrupted me:

“They could not help it, my friend. This is not a new break; it is an old one. It is not an accidental separation, but an intentional one, and it would not surprise me . . .”

Just then one of the workers came up to me and handed me a small roll of dirty paper.

“This was inside the hole,” he said. “Perhaps there is something in it.”

The archivist looked at me and took the roll of paper from out of my hand. With great care he attempted to unroll it and finally succeeded in spreading it out on the drawing board in my office and fastening it down with thumb tacks. It was a piece of heavy ancient document, like that which the most important contracts had been preserved upon in the past. I tried in vain to make sense of the confusion of red and black lines. It appeared to be some type of blueprint, even though my skills as an architect failed to make any sense of it. I gave up my efforts, but Doctor Holzbock declared that he was determined to solve the puzzle of the paper and asked me if he could take the find home with him.

Even before closing time he had returned and beckoned to me from afar with his hand. Solemnly, he laid his hand on my arm and led me through a small nearby door into the church, where we could be undisturbed. A wonderful evening sky, in which unfathomable purples, reds, and the deep emerald of the pilot boats with their white sails disappearing into the night, gave the lonely church something of their colors. The tall Baroque silver candlesticks, between which we were standing, were tinged with red. On the wall across from us St. Agnes allowed her anger to disappear and radiated in turn a glowing expression of sensuality. The statues of the saints, the pulpit and the angel below the gallery were transformed, as if released from the compulsions of the day and rejoicing in the night, in which they could be entirely free, and perhaps live a life of which we knew nothing.

In the meantime the archivist had pulled our blueprint out of his pocket and began:

“After some consideration it became clear to me that this blueprint as we see it now is meaningless. Or rather, its meaning is hidden. When we observe the confusion of lines, our senses are so overwhelmed, that it could be a blueprint, but we are not able to determine just exactly what it means.

The appearance of the paper, even the letters, which you find here and there among the lines, I can with confidence claim, originates from out of the first half of the 17th century. That was also the time when this building was a cloister for nuns. Now, I have found an old chronicle that speaks quite often and very specifically about this cloister, and seldom with very kindly thoughts.

You know that people often said the strangest things about cloisters during those times. My chronicle also has much to report about this cloister, but very little of it is edifying. If our guess is right, that this paper which we found is a blueprint, then it could very well signify some mystery of the old building, which was then deliberately made to appear confused and incomprehensible to anyone else. Another consideration strengthens me in this presumption. Have you discovered an inner passage at the portal, whose excavation you have begun today?"

"Yes, it adorned the entrance to the compound wings between the northern and the southern tracts and lies directly in front of the so called three cornered court. "

"Very good, then it will not have escaped you, that the top of this portal reaches as high as the second floor, so that some of the figures, that is the heads of the statues, could be reached without difficulty from the windows of the second floor.

Certainly, we can see that even now. The heads of some of the figures, including that of St. James, could be removed from the windows of the second floor without any trouble, if they had been separated from their bases. It would be easy to hide a dangerous paper in one of those clever recesses."

"You think so too?"

"Haven't I just told you that it was not a fresh break? Now I was so completely convinced of this, convinced that there was some hidden mystery behind the confused scribbles of our blueprint. The message was hidden, but how could I get to it? I had to consider everything, before I

applied any reactant chemical, because of the danger that I might spoil everything with it.

As a researcher of ancient history I have often had the opportunity to be amazed at the manifold and ingenious secret materials of the Middle Ages. I know many of the formulas for secret writing. Of these sympathetic ink plays the most important role, and the simplest type of this ink is one which becomes invisible again after drying and only becomes visible again when the paper is warmed up. This paper here could not be of that type, because it already has enough scribbles. But isn't the reverse also possible with the unimportant and confused lines? That was something I could try without fear of damaging our treasure. Well, my dear friend, I made the attempt and it was a complete success. Would you like to see?"

Dr. Holzbock pulled out a small pocket lamp and lit it; then he laid the plan on the warming cylinder. We waited silently in the growing twilight, which was only a little disturbed by the fearful light of the little lamp. After several minutes of observation, I believed that several of the lines were becoming fainter. Then they disappeared entirely. Finally, all that remained were several lines that clearly formed a blueprint.

"It is a blueprint like I said, and now it is your job to read it."

In a moment I found my directions, "Here is the three cornered court; here is the crossroads; this signifies the church and out from that is the Sacristy and out from the Sacristy . . . what is this? This line does not correspond to any masonry, it must be . . . Yes, and it is without a doubt a subterranean passage that leads out from the convent."

The archivist was beside himself with joy that his suspicions had been confirmed, and I was delighted as well. It seemed to me that this discovery must in some way have something to do with my nightly experiences. I was about to tell him about it but a strange shyness held me back. I have always been guarded at the beginning of things as they developed, not wanting to speak too much, for fear of the impact of the spoken word. The word is more powerful than our common sense thinks, and it influences the future in some mysterious and intangible way.

But Dr. Holzbock must have noticed something of this because he asked me almost anxiously, “What is wrong? You seem so out of sorts.”

But I pulled him into the Sacristy without giving an answer. Here I began to search the walls according to the measurements described in the plan. I found that an immense cabinet stood against the wall where the beginning of the subterranean passage should be. It was a gigantic cabinet that could hide an entire kingdom of vestments and treasures, a well-crafted piece of old world craftsmanship.

The monstrosity, heavy as a boulder, decorated with rich carvings, rose like a Colossus from the floor to the ceiling. The archivist placed its origins in the 16th century. We were both convinced that the entrance would be found behind this cabinet, but it was also very clear to us that we could not move this monstrosity from its place if we didn't know the secret mechanism.

“Enough for today,” said Dr. Holzbock and he managed to convince me that I should go home, although I had initially intended to remain in the Sacristy overnight, as if to guard our treasure from thieves. Our discovery and the assumptions that tied in with the blueprint occupied me so very much that my wife claimed I was obsessed. She scolded me for so long that I promised her, as I had done before, to apply for my vacation.

Although I was resolved to not leave my bed again that night, a strange feeling compelled me, in which fear mixed with curiosity, to get up in the dark hours and go down onto the street to wait.

It struck midnight and immediately I heard the fearful scream. The sound of running men came closer and the pursuit went past me exactly as it had the previous night. This time I could see perfectly that the woman was wearing a long, nun like garment that was open a little at the breasts, as if she had hurriedly thrown it on. She turned her head to me for a moment, a pale, beautiful face, in which her dark eyes glowed with a strange light.

Once more I was compelled to follow after the chase, and again everything disappeared at the fence that surrounded the rubble field. But I

believed I clearly seen the pursued woman tear open the gate and enter the building site.

“Didn’t you see anything tonight either?” I screamed at the night watchman. The man drew away from me and declared that he had not seen anything.

“But I know that she entered here. You must have seen a woman.”

When the night watchman insisted that he had seen no woman or anyone else, I pushed him aside and began to search without giving any explanation of why I was so upset and eager to get to the bottom of things. I climbed over all the debris piles, investigated all the rooms and a hundred times believed that I saw a woman in the long gray dress of a nun deep in the shadows. Once I turned around suddenly because it seemed as if she was following with quiet steps so close behind me in the moonlight that I could hear her breathing. I opened the church with the key, which I had put in the pocket of my coat that evening with a dark intention.

In that moment I didn’t consider that there could not have been any way for her to enter the locked church. After I convinced myself that there was no living being in the church I entered the Sacristy and pulled out the blueprint. The moonlight shone bright and green on the old cabinet so that the decorations shone as if made of bronze. The beautiful carvings sprang out from the golden brown background, and the exuberant cherubs appeared to come to life in the light.

A painting above the old cabinet that I had not noticed during the day caught my attention. It was an old painting, so darkened by the smoke of incense and candle flames that only the face of the saint could be made out, as if stepping out from the shadows of the centuries. Or maybe it was not the face of a saint? Perhaps it was the portrait of a woman who had once lived within these walls? It seemed more friendly and informal than the portrait of a saint. Then in the green moonlight it seemed to me as if I had seen this face once before. Those dark, flaming eyes burned into my own.

I trembled in a vague fear and suddenly I was assailed by a fearful thought. People often have a sensation that suddenly comes over them, that

is not born in them, as if it does not belong to them, but comes from somewhere outside of them, as if it is communicated to them somehow by a stranger. This sensation was so strong that I had the impression that the thought had been spoken out loud, as if someone near me had given a warning . . . in a whispering female voice. Yes indeed, warned . . . the sense of this strange thought was a warning. It was as if someone whispered to me that I should take care not to reveal the passageway that was indicated on my plan. I wanted to shake the thought away and attempted to attribute its emergence to the strange tranquility, which was so saturated with incense as to be almost tangible. It trickled incessantly from the old walls of the Sacristy, stirred up by the shaking of the demolition work of the adjacent building. The moonlight appeared filled with this trickle, as if it were made out of the grains of a silver sand that slipped through the hourglass of time.

The more stubbornly that I tried to turn my attention to observing my environment, the stronger the warning became. I needed to guard myself against revealing the blueprint; otherwise I would pull down a heavy misfortune upon myself. Again and again I frantically tried to contemplate the wonderful games of the moonlight and the more urgent and insistent the strange thought became. For a moment it seemed to me as if someone laid a hand on my shoulder and whispered into my ear. And then I sensed very perfectly, how a strange will tried to take control of me. I looked up and gazed into the dark, blazing eyes of the image above the cabinet.

Then it became painfully clear to me where I had seen those eyes before. It had been when the chase had passed by me; they were the eyes of the pursued woman. Even though I was not afraid, I was so startled, that I lost my senses. I did not cry out or run away, but I did something that was much worse. Slowly, my eyes fixed on those in the painting; I pulled myself back, step by step, as if to escape from a very real danger.

Then I gripped the large church key in my hand, like someone uses the nearest thing at hand as a weapon when ambushed by robbers. Finally, I was back in the church and slammed shut the door to the Sacristy. It echoed from lost alcoves in the darkness. The paintings and statues appeared to have changed their positions and looked scornfully down on me.

I quickly left the church.

The rest of the night was sleepless until morning. Even though I only first fell asleep at dawn, I awoke anyway, so that I could immediately begin work in the Sacristy. Despite the nightly warning, I was determined to uncover the passageway. My fear was during the night. My fear had no power over me during the day that could deter me.

As I entered the building site, I found the archivist already there, driven to come by the same impatience as I had been. I selected a number of skilled workers and told them how to proceed in removing the immense cabinet from its place. The painting over the cabinet, which I regarded with some trepidation, was ordinary, like dozens of other paintings, hidden under a thick dirty crust, of which little more than a pale spot—indicating the face of the portrayed saint—was clearly recognizable. It was not in the least sinister, and I was going to ask the archivist what he thought about the painting, but he spoke to me first.

“Listen,” he said to me, “it must have been very beautiful in this nun’s cloister. Yesterday, late in the evening, I took up the chronicle, and I thought that it might contain a few things of interest for us about this passage. I believe that I have already told you a few of the things that the chronicle reports of this cloister. Yesterday I read through everything once more, because I hoped to find some reference point for our research.

The modesty of the nuns, to the discredit of their cloister, in this place gave way to the most indulgent indecencies. They often gave themselves over to the worst excesses and the chronicle reports that quite often the clinking of glasses and cheeky laughter continued through the entire night and outraged the neighborhood. It must have been a type of lunacy, a frenzy of madness, that the entire cloister participated in and it incited the nuns to the wildest orgies. Quite often the citizens even saw the church itself lit, from which the noises came. They could hear from the sound that the nuns had chosen to use God’s house itself as the place for their festivities.

The clerics from the city were drawn to participate in these orgies and at first came only at night and entered the cloister in secret, but later they even came openly in the light of day. They were often seen leaving the cloister staggering, with bloated faces. Drunken nuns were seen lurching

around the courtyard and in the cloister gardens. It is no wonder that the pious citizens, to whom these passions were an abomination, made a protest to the Bishop. The Bishop himself came to investigate, but he found nothing more than a group of pious nuns, who led a contemplative, prayerful and holy life in this cloister, as was proper for the brides of Christ. And a survey of the clerics in the city only confirmed this observation.

The defaming accuser was brought before the court and sentenced to a hard punishment under pressure from the authority of the Bishop. As the Bishop turned his back on the city the shameful behaviors began once again. But no one dared to protest any more for fear of being punished. Of all the loose living nuns, sister Agathe was the worst. The orgies in the cloister were not enough to satisfy her. She must have been a very strange woman with a terrible and devilish rutting passion that tore at everything and destroyed it. She must have possessed the insatiability of a predator; because the chronicle tells of her, that she often left the cloister through a secret passage and spent nights running around the city.

She was a guest in the brothels and taverns of the suburbs and sat among the rabble, among the gamblers and drunkards, as if she belonged with them. She did this even though she was of noble birth, from one of the most prominent families of the country. Generations of carefully concealed vices from within her family were revealed in her and assumed a disgusting appearance. If she liked a young man, she wrapped herself around him and would not release him. With wild abandon, like a bacchanalian, she would pull him to herself. The entire city soon knew of her and spoke of her as a nightmare or a ghost.

They called her simply, “The wicked nun”. Then it happened that venereal disease slipped into the city. Agathe was also infected with it, but she was unable to contain her sexual drives and continued her wild living. As before, she danced in the taverns, sat among the rabble and fell upon young men in the street like a vampire.”

“What’s wrong with you?” Dr. Holzbock interrupted himself. “You look ill.”

I asked him to stop his story for a moment and turned away, in order to check the progress of the work. The floorboards were torn up all around the immense cabinet and the mortar was scraped away from the wall. But it was not possible to move the cabinet even an inch.

“I believe,” said the foreman, “that the cabinet is anchored into the wall.”

It could not be otherwise, but then it must have been anchored to the wall at the same time that the Sacristy was built. That meant our blueprint was wrong or—we looked at each other, and the archivist spoke my thought out loud.

“The passage goes in through the cabinet.”

I was excited and beside myself with impatience over the new revelation and angry over so many obstacles.

“How are we going to find the way through? We would have to break the entire cabinet into pieces and we can’t do that. It is part of the church inventory. What should we do?”

The archivist was almost as impatient as I was. While Dr. Holzbock considered, I searched the entire cabinet, pressed on all the protruding ornaments, pulled out all the drawers, at least the ones that were not locked, and measured all the dimensions, in order to perhaps find the hidden door out of some curious relationship.

“Don’t bother yourself over it,” said the archivist. “This cabinet, which has held its secret safe against generations of the curious, will not reveal itself to us either, without further counsel. We must search in the archives, perhaps . . .”

I was not listening anymore; as my eyes estimated the height of the cabinet, my glance fell upon the painting that was hanging over it, and suddenly it seemed to me as if this painting must give me the key. To the amazement of the archivist, I ordered a ladder to be placed against the cabinet and climbed up. Such close proximity to the pale face, being eye to eye with it, brought the horror of the night back to me. But I composed

myself and began to examine the portrait. The thick layer of dirt left little more to be recognized, even this close, than that it portrayed someone in the garment of a nun, whose hair was free of ribbons or a hood, and whose head was surrounded by curly hair. Strangely enough, this hair looked more like snakes tangled together, like someone might paint the head of Medusa. But the painting was in such poor condition that you could not be certain about it. She wore an ornament on a string around her neck. It was not a cross, like one might find on a nun, but a type of brooch, a decoration, an ornament. It looked like a small lily that was enclosed in a polygon. It seemed to me as if I had seen the same ornament down below on the cabinet as well. The lily had been enclosed in a hexagon, a rhombus and again in a pentagon as it was here.

“Doctor,” I cried as I climbed down the ladder. “I believe that I am on the trail of a mystery.”

“And you have picked up the trail up there in the portrait?”

“I believe so. The key is a lily in a pentagram. Let’s search for it.”

Although I knew very well that I had seen the ornament, I was so confused at the time; that I could not immediately find it again. The sections of the cabinet seemed to me as if they were swimming in a fog, and I struggled in vain against a tiredness, which I now, in the decisive moment, could not explain. It almost felt the way frostbite feels.

Then the archivist cried out next to me, “Here is a lily in a pentagon. Now what?”

My tension had suddenly returned again, it was inescapable; there was no doubt about the outcome. I examined the lily, all the curious workers stood around us. It seemed to me as if the wood gave a little beneath my hand. Then I pressed with all my strength—there was a groan that went through the ancient cabinet, a deep moan coming from its deepest depths and a narrow gap cut through the cabinet from the top to bottom. We put our shoulders to it, but the rusty hinges, not used for centuries, gave way only grudgingly. We had to open the door jerkily and had time to marvel at the secret inner mechanism.

Externally, this also followed portions of the cabinet's broad formation, with pressure on the lily the united surfaces visibly separated to expose a door. At the same moment, in which this was opening, the drawers of the cabinet were pushed back to the left and to the right out-of-the-way and we stood before the back wall of the cabinet. There it was not hard to find the button which we had to press in order to open the door as well.

The dark mouth of a passageway lay behind it. I wanted to plunge inside, but the archivist held me back.

“Patience, first we have to test whether the air inside is breathable.”

A candle was tied to a stick, lit and held in the passageway. It burned with a wild flame; great drops of melted wax fell into the darkness.

We entered the passage.

Several steps down, then straight, then down a few more steps, and then straight.

“I believe we have found the secret way of the wicked nun,” whispered the archivist.

He simply suspected it. I was certain of it. I was still in a very anxious mood, even though the air was relatively fresh.

“Mary and Joseph,” suddenly exclaimed the worker who had gone on ahead with the candle. He remained standing there. Here the walls sprang back into the darkness, the passage opened into a type of burial vault, in whose middle stood four wooden coffins on a wooden platform. They were very simple, unadorned coffins, whose form and shape went well back several centuries. The archivist lifted off one of the lids; a nun lay inside with a mummified dried out face, her hands crossed over her breasts, her clothing had disintegrated so that her flesh, which had withstood corruption, was visible in several places through the holes.

We took the lids off the remaining coffins as well. In the fourth coffin lay Agathe, the “wicked nun”. I recognized her immediately. She was the woman that had been pursued by the crowd of angry men at night; that

had run past my house. It was the original image of the painting in the Sacristy.

Then next to me, the archivist said, “You know that one of these corpses must be that of sister Agathe, the “wicked nun”?”

“I know. It is this one here. I recognize her again. Just look, see how much better she looks than the others. Notice how the others are real corpses, but this one . . .”

Dr. Holzbock seized my hand and said, “We need to look for a way out of this passage. The air down here could still be dangerous. Forward!”

But the passage didn’t go very much further forward. After thirty steps we had to stop. A portion of the roof had collapsed there and filled up the passage. According to my calculations we were just under the street and I saw that the collapse must have happened a short time ago; apparently due to the shaking of the heavily laden dump trucks that were clearing away the debris of the old building. There was a risk and danger that still other portions could collapse; so I gave the order to push a shaft down through from the street, to investigate everything and stop all traffic in order to prevent an accident.

Then we returned back through the tomb. In passing, I became convinced that my observation had been right. She really did look different than the other three. It was almost as if she was alive. Her skin was still firm, had a glow of color, and her smooth forehead shone. She was still very beautiful and it seemed to me, in the light of the candle, as if her eyes looked out from under her eyelids and followed what we were doing with cunning and sly glances.

When we arrived in the Sacristy I had to sit down. I was out of breath and my legs trembled.

“I must tell you,” said the archivist, “that I have come to the conclusion that one of the mummies down there is sister Agathe. My chronicle relates the story in its history of this cloister. The pestilence, whose priestess sister Agathe was, spread widely, until finally a terrible outrage broke out among the citizenry. They lay in ambush for the nun and

wanted to kill her. But it seemed as if even the danger increased her lust for adventure. She was driven to even wilder things than before, and what is even stranger; she had found an entire crowd of protectors, of young men who loved her, even though they knew that they would be poisoned by her. I have already said that she must have been a fearful woman. Her power over her lovers was unlimited. But one day an armed crowd showed up in front of the cloister and demanded the delivery of sister Agathe.

The rage of the people had risen to an extreme and they threatened to storm the cloister and burn it if the wicked nun was not handed over to them. The abbess was compelled to negotiate with the rebels. She promised to punish Agathe and pleaded for an extension of three days. The more reasonable of the attackers agreed to this, and to follow through on the acceptance of this request. After the three days were up the crowd appeared again before the cloister and were informed by the abbess that sister Agatha had suddenly become sick and died.

The chronicle is not very clear whether it was really a coincidence that came to the help of the abbess, or whether someone committed a murder in order to pacify the citizenry. The times were such that it could have been either way, but the hoped for calm did not appear. Despite the fact that a burial took place, that a coffin had been sunk into the earth; despite the convincing fact that a stone had been erected with the words, "The Wicked Nun" on the grave site; the rumor still arose that sister Agathe still lived.

As so often happens at the death of a very wicked or much loved person, it is hard to believe that they are really dead. That was the way it was with her as well. They wanted the nun to be alive, so they still saw her. They reported raids that she took, in which she fell upon the young men. Finally they were convinced that the abbess had played a joke on them, to avert the threat of danger.

Others, those that were inclined to believe in the death of sister Agathe, considered it a desecration of the sacred cemetery to have her corpse buried next to the bodies of the honest and pious citizens. The believers and the suspicious were united in their request to have the grave

opened, so they could convince themselves that the nun was really inside. It must have been a terrible hatred that followed this woman.

When those in the cloister became aware of the intentions of the angry citizens, they removed the corpse from the grave one night and brought it back into the cloister. The chronicle describes the entire story as a serious uprising that had to be dealt with. When the citizens found the empty grave they drew up once more in a crowd in front of the cloister. The corpse of the nun was shown to them from out of a window. Stones and pieces of wood were thrown at the dead body. A shot was fired into it. The chronicle also adds that the most outraged were the young men who had loved her; those that had thought that she still lived.

Those in the cloister recognized that even the death of sister Agathe could not protect her corpse from the hatred of her persecutors. They kept her corpse and placed it in a tomb, as they always hid the bodies of those nuns, who had been murdered for some reason. Today we found that tomb. She lies on the same path on which she so often went upon her adventures.”

“That is true,” I said.

“And now you must tell me how you came to the conclusion that we had finally found the wicked nun. You had not yet heard the end to my story. How were you able to recognize one of the mummies as sister Agathe right away? And how did you go straight to the portrait up there for the answer that we needed to continue?”

What could I tell the archivist? Could I tell him about my nighttime experiences? I asked him a counter question to change the subject.

“Haven’t you noticed the similarity between this painting and the dead woman we found down below?”

“No,” said Dr. Holzbock and examined the painting, which was now clearly visible in the bright afternoon sun.

“In any case you would need to look at it very closely. . .”

He took the ladder that had been leaning in a corner and set it up. But he was unable to take the painting down from the wall. I—I—couldn't bring myself to help him. I called for two workers to assist him with it and left, because I could not rid myself of the superstitious belief that it would be better if the painting remained on the wall.

The apparition of my nights came once more, and in such a way that it overwhelmed me by force, even in the bright of day. I saw myself entangled in a very strange story and I felt with horror; that I could not get free. It lay around me like coils. When I was back in the bright sunshine, standing in the noise and dust of the work outside, I made the decision to not worry anymore about what had happened to me and to call in sick tomorrow and immediately begin my vacation. But first, I wanted to bring my observations to an end that night. I was convinced that some type of conclusion must come.

After a quarter of an hour the archivist came with both workers and declared that it was not in any way possible to bring the painting down from the wall without breaking the frame or cutting through the canvas.

“Don't shrug your shoulders,” he said. “It seems as if you act and know more about these remarkable and mysterious things than my chronicle. You still need to give me your opinion of these things, which I intend to write about in an article for the publication of the historical society.”

With that he left, leaving the impression of a very honest, educated man of romantic inclinations, not at all very tormented.

The day was endless for me. Every hour gray faces slipped past me, like bored, indolent shadows. When evening came my wife noticed my excitement, and I could only calm her with my promise that the next day I would call in sick. It was eleven o'clock and the light still burned on my wife's side of the bed. For some reason, today of all days, she was not able to fall asleep and I was beside myself with fear that my plans would be thwarted. Finally, just before midnight, she bent down over me once more and I pretended that I was asleep. She extinguished the candle with the snuffer and two minutes later was in no condition to hear me as I lightly got

up and left the room. Just as I came to the front door, the old clock in the tower of the cloister struck midnight. I heard the scream, the sound of running men and then the woman flew past me—it was Agathe; her terrible, smoldering eyes looked at me, and then came the pack of pursuers. I raced after them.

It was again the same dreamlike gliding and floating, in which the houses to the left and right of me appeared like steep walls that determined the course of our run. There were only two things that I was able to see with complete clarity. The group of pursuers in front of me and the night sky above us; which was filled with many white clouds like the individual chunks of ice that cover a river during the time of the spring thaw. From time to time the sickle of the moon appeared between the columns and cracks of the cloud fragments, like a boat upon the dark, abysmal waters of heaven.

Then the chase neared the board fence that surrounded the rubble field, and the figures in front of me disappeared. But it was not the indecisive running back and forth of the pursuers as before. Instead, they appeared to be swallowed up into some type of funnel. It seemed to me as if they whirled together and rose up like a pillar of smoke that was then sucked down into the earth. I stood there right before the shaft which had been dug out during the course of the day at my command.

The excavated earth lay around its mouth; some boards and two red lanterns gave a warning to the passersby. But the boards which covered the opening to the tomb had been thrown to the side. I tore open the door of the fence and ran— without even searching for the night watchman, who must have been somewhere else in the large area—between the rubble piles into the great court, that was still identifiable in the remains of the surrounding building.

I don't know which voice told me that I had to be there; it was a compulsion which I could not escape. I had scarcely found a hiding place behind the rubble of a great wall when I saw that the court was filled with figures.

What I saw then is almost impossible to describe. Everything was like in a dream and yet completely clear. The figures came from the church, which I saw in front of me in the moonlight. But whether they all came through the door, which stood wide open, or whether they came pouring out from the walls; it was impossible for me to determine. It just seemed to me that there were so many of them, that they could not have come out through the door all at once. But the strangest thing was that I saw them all in living motion, waving at each other and it seemed as if they were shouting; they called to each other, pushed each other aside and pressed forward with wild gestures. I never even questioned how it was that even though I heard the sound of many steps, I did not hear any of the words that I saw people speaking. I could hear none of the shouts. I had the impression that I was seeing a performance on a stage, from which I was separated by a thick glass wall, so that I could see the performance but not hear anything. This impression became so strong that the actors in this tumultuous scene even appeared to be costumed. For the most part they wore the comfortable and tight fitting garb of the 16th century. But several of them were looser, like the clothing of students, or dressed more serious and solemn, like councilmen.

There was a certain degree of terror in which all concern for myself had disappeared and I lived only through my eyes; while at the same time all of my other senses appeared to be shut off. I had reached this level, and I can vouch for the fact that everything I saw actually happened. The entire court was filled with figures and several times they came so near to my hiding place that I could see their staring faces perfectly.

After some milling around they all directed their attention to the open door of the church, and a group of men came out of it, in whose midst a woman was being led. They pushed her forwards with their fists and pulled on the rope they had tied around her neck. I saw her shrug her shoulders, as if to get rid of some annoying insect. One of the students pressed the others back, rushed forward, appeared to throw some insults into her face, and struck her two times on the head with the side of a polished sword. Then the woman raised her smooth, white forehead and looked at the man with dark flaming eyes. It was sister Agathe, the wicked

nun. With incessant beatings and kicks they pulled her up into the middle of the court yard, where a number of black clothed councilmen stood.

I saw her figure stand up straight in the pale, fearful moonlight in front of a group of men, in which the common hatred of the entire crowd seemed to be embodied. The white hood was slid back from the head of the nun and she looked just like she did in the painting in the Sacristy. Then one of the councilmen stepped forward, and while the crowd pressed forward from all sides, he broke a white stick over the head of the nun and flung it down at her feet with a gesture of dismissal. At that the people drew back and left a place free, where the nun now stood next to a block. From the block arose a man in a red cloak. I saw all the gruesome details of the execution.

I saw how the man pulled out a polished broadsword and threw down his red cloak as he opened the gown of the nun so that her white throat and beautiful shoulders were visible, and how he forced her to her knees in front of the block. I wanted to scream and yet was thankful that her dark, threatening eyes were finally turned away from me; which in those final moments had been rigidly turned toward my hiding place, as if she had seen me there. Then her head lay on the block, and I saw the sword swing high in the moonlight; then a jet of blood sprayed out. But it did not fall to the earth, not a single drop fell into the dust, instead it remained in the air, as if it were frozen in that moment, while the head fell from the block, and as if following the last desire of the executed, rolled straight towards me.

At that the crowd threw their hats into the air and broke into a tremendous celebration; which I saw perfectly, even though I heard no sound. And in a sudden impulse they all rushed toward the corpse, pushed, beat and dragged it around as if their anger was not yet entirely satisfied.

But the head kept rolling, further, without changing its direction, straight toward me, and finally remained lying right in front of my hiding place. The dark flaming eyes looked at me and I heard words, the first words of the entire terrible scene, from out of the mouth of the head.

“You shall remember the wicked nun.”

At that everything disappeared in front of me, the tumult of the crowd, the head, the executioner and his block, and only the red crescent of jetting, frozen blood remained floating for a moment in the green moonlight.

There remains nothing more to add, other than, the next morning the corpse of sister Agathe was found in a terrible condition in the tomb. It was disfigured by kicks and blows, all of the limbs were broken and the head had been completely severed from the body by a smooth cut. It was a suspected case of sexual lunacy and a thorough investigation was begun, during the course of which I was also questioned. But the authorities were not able to reach a conclusion, because I guarded myself well and refrained from telling what I had seen that night.

A fearful crime occurred on the morning of the 17th; July 19 . . . the entire city was in an uproar. The serving maid of engineer and architect Hans Anders after several fruitless knocks on the bedroom door finally shook it around ten o'clock, found that it was unlocked and entered the bedroom. A young woman lay in her bed in the middle of a pool of blood. There was nothing to be seen of the gentleman. The maid ran out of the room screaming and fainted. When it was finally gotten from her what she had seen, a young student from the 3rd floor, the calmest of the excited and frightened household, was sent immediately for an ambulance and the police.

The Commissioner was solidly convinced that a crime had been committed. The young woman had been dead for several hours; her head smoothly severed from her body by a powerful blow. Otherwise everything in the apartment remained in order. Only one of the paintings in the bedroom had been taken down from the wall and completely destroyed. The frame had been broken into small pieces and the canvas torn to shreds. No sign pointed to an entry of the murderer from the outside and it was confirmed that the occupants had gone to bed as usual last night. When the maid was asked if she had noticed any disputes lately between Anders and his wife, she thought for a moment and then declared that she had not

noticed anything other than too much of a silence between both, and sometimes a nervous trembling of the wife.

Despite this statement there remained no other choice than to assume that Frau Anders had been murdered by her husband for no obvious reason and he had then escaped. The statements of others in the household were consistent with those of the maid. But from out of all these statements nothing was found to indicate such a serious discord that could explain the fearful deed that followed. But the court doctor declared they should not be ensnared by the lack of any outward signs of discord, or be in complete sympathy with the husband. Especially when people of high culture, such as Hans Anders and his wife were, often played out such catastrophes silently and inwardly. This only strengthened the resolve of the police commissioner who immediately ordered the most zealous search for the husband of the murdered woman.

They found Hans Anders that afternoon on a bench in the city park, with a bare head, hat and walking stick nearby. At the time he was busily occupied in rolling a cigarette. He obeyed the request of the watchman without resistance, and even said that he had been thinking about going to the police himself and giving an explanation of the incident. He was in the best of moods and good spirits as he entered the office of the police commissioner and asked for a moment of his time. He said that he wanted to share with him why he had cut the head off the neck of the woman.

The commissioner stared at him in horror, "Herr, are you admitting to the murder of your wife?"

Anders smiled, "My wife?—No!"

And then he gave such a strange and incomprehensible statement that neither the commissioner nor the trial judge, to whom the case had been assigned that same evening, was able to make any sense of it. They could only determine this much; that Hans Anders had confessed to having cut off his wife's head with a Turkish dagger from his weapon collection; but at the same time he claimed that his wife was not really his wife. When he saw that they did not understand him at all, he asked them to talk to his acquaintance, the archivist Dr. Holzbock, who would confirm everything

through his own statement. Before they could even summon the archivist he appeared before them of his own free will and gave the following statement to the trial judge.

“I consider it my duty to bring some light through my statement into the fearful history of Hans Anders; as much as such a highly strange and mysterious matter can be brought into the light. I have been acquainted with him for quite some time. I found myself almost daily on the same rubble field of the Jesuit barracks where Anders was supervising the demolition work.

My historical and archaeological work is known to you and had also been known to him. I hoped to find several interesting discoveries in the removal of the centuries old building. Certain signs put me on the track of a mysterious passage, and Anders, whose competency as an architect stands without question, followed this track with so much ingenuity and luck that we succeeded in discovering an old tomb with several mummified corpses. You will recall that one of these corpses, on the day after the discovery of the tomb, was found in such a desecrated condition that it was considered a crime.

But at the time the investigation did not come to any conclusion. Several days later Hans Anders came to me. I must confess that he appeared to be a completely different person from the last time I had seen him. He was restless, quite contrary to his usual energetic and amiable nature; at times absentminded and then surly, but at times he trembled, as if being tortured by a terrible fear.

This condition seemed so peculiar to me that I asked him what was wrong. He gave me an evasive answer. Finally, after a while, when he was no longer able to master his anxiety, he began by saying that the painting had been sent to the house.

“What painting?” —

“The portrait of sister Agathe, the wicked nun—don’t you remember, it hung so solidly in the Sacristy that no one could take it down from the wall—you said yourself that you couldn’t do it. Isn’t it true,” he

said, “that you were not able to succeed in taking the painting down? But I swear to you, it is now hanging in my apartment.”

“Who brought it into your house?”

“That’s just it. I don’t know who brought it because I was gone. A strange man brought it, hung it on the wall and then left without saying who had sent it. There had to be some way of determining who sent it, so I finally went to the priest. But he didn’t know anything about it when I asked him; he couldn’t even give any evidence that the painting was part of the church inventory. He was very happy to see the painting go and had already been thinking about getting rid of it for quite some time. But the terrible thing is that I can’t put the painting back even if I wanted to. Why? Because it is now hanging just as solidly on my wall as it did earlier in the Sacristy. It is inconceivable, yet indisputable, and I ask you to visit me in order to convince yourself, that I am speaking the truth.”

I must confess that this sharing of the architect came across as sounding very strange to me, that the painting which it concerns, is claimed by Hans Anders to be the portrait of sister Agathe, one of the nuns, whose mummy we had found in the tomb. In order to calm the excited man, I promised that I would visit him within the next few days. I remembered my promise later at the end of the week as I was coincidentally going past his apartment. Hans Anders was not there, but I met with his wife at home.

“Oh, I’m so happy,” she said, “that you have come to visit us. I was already determined to look you up, you and several other known acquaintances of my husband that he is close to. He thinks very highly of you, and I hope because of that you might have some influence on him.”

As I expressed my willingness to be at her service, she began to complain through tears, that her husband must be sick.

“He goes around so strangely disturbed, scarcely speaking a word for days and tosses around back and forth sleeplessly in bed at night. He has already promised for several days that he was going to take some vacation and leave immediately, because he was certainly over worked and tired, but he cannot be persuaded to leave the city.”

“My God,” she said. “I scarcely speak of doctors any more. He flares up at those words and reproaches me, as if I am being degrading to him.”

I agreed with Frau Blanka that she must try convincing her husband to take a trip. A few moments later Anders came back home.

He greeted me, obviously delighted, and also gave his wife a greeting. But some sentiment told me that something stood between the two spouses, a shadow, a formless thing, an invisible influence that worked on both and separated them. This influence worked on Frau Blanka as anxiety and on Anders—at first I believed I was wrong, but I saw my observation confirmed—as revulsion for his wife; fear mixed with revulsion. That seemed highly strange to me, because I knew that earlier Anders had been uncommonly in love with his wife.

After a short, indifferent conversation Frau Blanka withdrew, in order for me to have the promised opportunity to speak with Hans. She was scarcely out of the room when Hans seized me by the arm and pulled me into the bedroom.

“Come,” he whispered. “You will see it.”

Over a sofa—and across from the bed—hung the painting from the Sacristy, a green curtain hung next to it and was pulled back. It was a somewhat eerie portrait, a face that seemed to speak of wild sins, and if it really did portray sister Agathe, then it did a good job of showing the blasphemous impulses of this nun that were reported in the old chronicle.

I moved over toward the painting with the intention of taking it down from the wall. I wanted Anders to know that his absurd fantasies must give way to reality. But he sprang at me with such a ferocious movement that I was frightened as he pushed me back.

“What you intend is impossible. It now hangs here on the wall and no power in the world can take it away.”

Apparently he had forgotten that just a few days ago he had invited me to his home in order to convince me of the correctness of his

explanation.

“But why,” I asked, “have you allowed this painting to be brought into your bedroom? This face can bring bedevilment into the most peaceful of dreams.”

“I already told you,” answered Anders, “that I was not at home when the painting arrived. The man that brought it hung it right there without asking; and now I can’t get away from it. I’ve tried to pull a curtain over it. But—“

His voice became very hoarse with excitement.

“She will not tolerate the curtain. When I pull it shut in the evening, it is pulled back again around midnight. She is always watching me, continuously, with her terrible eyes. I cannot bear it. And do you know why she looks at me that way? I will tell you.”

He pulled me away from the painting and whispered so softly that I could scarcely understand:

“She has sworn to have revenge on me, and she will keep her word. She is planning something terrible, and I believe that I know what she intends.”

And suddenly he interrupted himself to ask me, what at the time, I thought to be an unrelated question.

“Have you really looked at my wife?”

But before I could answer, he continued.

“Nonsense! What I imagine at times is nonsense.”

And then he returned to what he had been saying, “She wants to destroy me, because I discovered the subterranean passageway; because I ordered the shaft to be dug down from the street and in doing that allowed her pursuers to follow her into the tomb.”

Anders dismissed my objections with a hand movement.

“Believe me doctor, it is true. I have considered this thing very carefully, and if you have seen what I have seen, you would agree with me.”

I was only later to discover what Anders meant with this dark insinuation. These words are impressed upon my memory with utmost vividness, and I will always see his face close to mine as he whispered them to me. His entire behavior gave me the impression that he was very ill, but my advice for him to leave the city and go into the mountains for a few weeks was to no avail.

“I must stay here,” he said. “It would be in vain if I tried to escape her. She could seek me out at three thousand meters just as easily as here.”

The weirdest thing about his nature was that he openly admitted to having to do battle with some ghostly apparition as if it were a real power. I made Frau Blanka aware of it and told her that her influence would be needed in this matter.

“Influence?” she said, and the poor woman was almost in tears. “I don’t even have enough influence that I’m allowed to send for the doctor for him.”

In order to do the woman a favor, the next morning I sent my friend Dr. Engelhorn to visit Anders. But the architect fell into such a rage that Engelhorn had to beat a hasty retreat. At that time I was called away to search for an important document in the archives of Castle Pernstein. It was several days before I found the document; but during the search I also found several other highly interesting items and my stay was extended for several days.

On my return I used the train for only a few stations and then climbed out in order to hike through the beautiful forest to reach the city. In passing by a popular tourist resort I chanced to glance over the fence of the garden and saw Hans Anders sitting at a table. I must confess that I had entirely forgotten his story because of my work, and in that moment it weighed very heavy on my heart that I had neglected my friend so very much.

In order to immediately find out how things were going with him, I stepped into the pub garden and greeted him. I saw that Anders was very drunk, even though he was normally a very sober man, and I immediately thought that it must have something to do with his dark story.

“Oh doctor Archivist,” he called out to me. I am very happy, extraordinarily pleased, and greet you in the name of science.”

While I drank my quarter bottle of Moravian wine, he drank the rest, and only as it began to turn dusk did I succeed in walking him home. We were going slowly along the river and could see the lights of the Königsmühle before us through the fog filled valley, when Anders finally began to speak about that which, as I had suspected, he was still incessantly preoccupied with.

“Now I finally know what she intends.”

“But don’t talk about her so much,” I began, “as if she is a real person.”

Hans Anders looked at me and didn’t understand my objection; he was so comfortable in his imaginings.

“Do you know what happened right in front of my eyes? It is terrible. She has taken over my wife.”

“What are you talking about?”

“She has taken over my wife and the transformation is going on in front of my eyes. It began with the eyes; a strange, lurking gaze surfaced in them, with which she watched me, my goings and comings, all of my movements. When I said something, then it smoldered in those fearful eyes like scorn. But then even her figure started to change. My wife is shorter and stockier, the woman that now sits near me and sleeps or pretends to be asleep and watches me beneath closed lids, is more slender and taller. She encircles me, spins me in her web. She has murdered my wife and taken possession of her body, in order to be near me, and on the day, in which she looks exactly like the portrait on the wall, then she will completely take me over as well. But I am determined, to pre-empt her.”

I realized with horror that the nervous excitement of the man had already made such progress that you could speak of it as a mental disorder. It was high time to move forward and with energy. I was even thinking it over the next day with my friend, Dr. Engelhorn, what to do, in order to help the poor woman, when Frau Blanka came to visit me. She looked much harried, pale with sunken, shifty eyes and had become so thin that she looked somewhat taller to me.

“I know everything, gracious lady,” I said.

At that she began to cry.

“How could you know? You can only imagine what I suffer. My life has become a hell for me. In my case that is not just a phrase, but the bitter truth. I cannot stand it any longer. My husband has been entirely transformed. I see very well that he has revulsion for me. He watches me silently; I always feel his terrible gaze on me, and he acts as if he expects me to do something evil to him.

Sometimes he turns around suddenly with an angry movement, as if he believes that I am creeping after him. He says almost nothing at all, and when I talk to him, he answers as if every word is a trap. And when I attempt to ask about the cause of his strange behavior he laughs at me so fearfully . . .

Last night, well he was gone for the entire day and came home a little drunk—just as I was in the act of undressing; he was suddenly standing behind me. Before that he had been in his room and I had seen through the glass door that he was reading a journal and paging through it. But all at once he was standing there behind me. He had silently snuck up on me, and when I turned around, he seized me by the neck and said:

“Such a beautiful neck and already severed once.”

I became afraid and wanted to know what he meant. But he only laughed so horribly and waved at the old portrait that hangs in our bedroom.

“Ask her, or better yet; ask yourself.”

I could not sleep that night and thought about his strange words. But the next morning I got up and went into his room to get the journal, because it seemed to me as if it must have something to do with his altered being. It still lay on the writing desk and was completely filled with my husband's handwriting. I remembered that he had been writing in the journal this past week; in a strange haste, often as if upset and so irritable that the slightest sound in his vicinity was enough to set him off, and it had something to do with me, that had him working there so very fascinated and agitated. But as I began to think about reading it a strange fear overcame my curiosity. I dared not even open it because I . . . because I feared to experience something horrible.

That's why I'm bringing this journal to you and asking you to read it, and then tell me what it is about; at least share with me as much as you think is good for me to know."

With that, she handed me the journal which I am now handing over to you, Herr Judge. You will find the most highly remarkable things inside, and I will leave it to your own ingenuity, to make some sense out of this story that is still very confusing to me. (We have placed the detailed account of Hans Anders at the beginning of this report.)

Dr. Engelhorn and I attempted to talk the woman out of her concerns and, even though we were convinced that danger was very near, acted as if she had nothing to be afraid about. So we managed to reassure her somewhat and she went back to her house, after we promised that we would read her husband's journal and give a report about it to her immediately the very next day; and that was an unforgivable omission. This absence of presence of mind, of vigorous resolve on the part of her friends, has cost the poor woman her life. So it was with us men, we saw the danger very clearly, but we failed to deal with it in time. As we—Dr. Engelhorn and I—read through the journal, we looked at each other.

"He is insane," I said.

But Dr. Engelhorn is a strange man. Although he is a representative of the exact sciences; he still preserves, just as well, a type of superstitious belief in all kinds of "night conditions" of the human soul. With every

opportunity he repeats the saying, “It gives more things between heaven and earth . . . ect.” And when medical science is confronted by a puzzle, nobody is happier about it than Dr. Engelhorn. Therefore I was not at all surprised when he looked at me doubtfully.

“Insane? I don’t know whether I can agree with you. I do not get that impression from him. There are circumstances, where insanity and despair seem similar and yet it is not insanity. But in order to explain this to you I must . . .”

“Well, it just as well could be,” I interrupted him.

But he simply shrugged his shoulders at me.

“I don’t know.”

“This conversation, Herr Judge, took place late that night. The next morning I heard that Frau Blanka had been murdered. But what precipitated this terrible deed can only be learned from Hans Anders himself. We can only suspect that through this murder he thought to free himself of this spirit, and that the destruction of the portrait had something to do with it as well.

It is up to the court to decide these things, or perhaps the last word in this strange story will be spoken by a psychiatrist.”

That was the statement of the archivist Dr. Holzbock. Two days later the mysterious case of Hans Anders was brought to a type of conclusion. They found him in the interrogation room, in a sitting position, leaning back against the wall. One hand was on his heart, the right arm hanging down limply, in such a twisted manner that the prison doctor shook his head at it when he began his examination. He found that the arm had been dislocated and broken several times as if it had been crushed by a terrible force. But the doctor determined the actual cause of death was a heart attack due to sudden terror.

Master Jericho

Light shone from the church square through the green and gold stained glass of the church window into the niche above the arched door, where scorned saints crowded against each other under a stony roof. We came in from the warm summer and breathed in the cool fragrance of incense mixed with the strong smell of girl's fresh skirts. The organ dinned around us, hammered us on the head, stamped down from the heights of the nave with heavy beats.

Violated by the tones we huddled together, Angelika and I, seeking an attitude of devotion, while Richard stood next to us, a strong man, full of jealousy toward me— wasn't he my friend?—certainly, but despite that he was.

How the barrage dinned in the nave as it pressed against the altar. Then a soft loveliness moved against it, weaved through it, dissolving it, almost softening it to a gentle whisper. Prometheus' wrath still grumbled as ever but was overwhelmed by a heavenly brilliance. It was haunting, as if the trembling discordant tones began to resolve themselves into singing human voices; sad, immersed in nameless sorrows, resounding secrets from out of a lacerated breast, voluptuous unimaginable horrors like a song of the damned. Applause quickly broke out; the stamping of golden hoofs brought the close and hallelujah.

"Have I said too much?" asked Richard under the chestnut tree in the procession of the crowd leaving the church.

"A master! A master, a very great one. Isn't he! He grabs you, throws you right into it! So that you forget seeing and hearing! You have to bite your teeth together . . . that fat man over there, his quill leads dozens of musicians; next to him, the one with the hunched back, is the organ professor from the music academy; the one in knee high socks and a green coat is the composer of the opera "Michelangelo".

"Why would Master Jericho be contented with our humble church?" asked Angelika.

“They must all come if they want to hear him. He plays nothing other than our organ. So this little city has become the pilgrimage location of St. Musika’s grace. What man has not prayed to him since the three months he has been here? He blows the golden mountain away like fog and what remains . . .”

On the summer homecoming trip of our young marriage, we found our quiet village famous, a mecca for music fanatics, on the path to vogue. The master’s peculiar moods only attracted the public even more.

“I am afraid,” said Angelika, “afraid of this music.”

Her pale hand, tightly clenched, lay across my arm.

“It is demonic,” agreed Richard. “It is demonic. Isn’t it as if the deepest pain has broken out from the breast of a human? The organ sobs and screams, rages up and worships. . .”

From across the cemetery, which we were going through, came a pandemonium, piercing screams from over by the fresh graves. At the end of the row a clotted human arm was held high. As we passed it we heard crying and cursing.

“There is another grave that has been defiled,” said Richard. “I’ve written you about these things. It is a weird oddity of our village, mischief, sometimes crimes such as desecration of graves and body snatching which upsets the senses of the population.”

Meanwhile they found the fresh mound dug up and the coffin broken into. The corpse had been torn out and the chest ripped open as if torn apart by claws.

In Capri Richard’s letters read like a ballad from out of the north, unreal and distant like fog over a moor and thick forests. You could smile about a land where such fairytales went around. Here, having become real, in instant impact with the occurrence itself, everything became a horror. In the middle of daylight, the angry, frightened faces, the sound of shocked words, the clenching of hands. Several were struck numb with

bewilderment; others spread their agitation far around them. The widow sobbed into the breasts of a baffled mixture of merchants.

“It is the old colonel,” said someone, “from Brunnen Street over there. Our neighbor . . . He played the violin wonderfully . . . most wonderfully. He was buried yesterday . . .”

The slender hand on my arm suddenly grew heavy. Angelika’s breath drifted closer to my ear. The trembling of her body ran into mine.

“Who is that?” She quivered out a question.

Between the graves, on the other side of the path, came a short man in black, a clumpy body on long legs, coat tails falling down to the curved hollow of the knee. His head was turned toward the earth, a confusion of grayish green colored musician’s hair spilled out from under his top hat.

“That’s him!” said Richard hastily. “Master Jericho!”

Many people looked searchingly at him; he held himself distant. As the composer in the jacket came up toward him, he jumped long legged over the mounds, escaping behind the charnel house, on whose wall St. Christopher stood in monstrously hacked up defilement. A red blooming bush softly waved as if an animal had just slunk through it.

“He lives over there,” reported Richard. “right behind the charnel house, on the cemetery wall in the dilapidated house, unapproachable as a bear.

What a friendly man our deceased organist was. Dear God, every place was happy to reach their arm out from the brush and wave to him from the wine tavern.

But this stranger, his successor, this unknown that came here, is an enemy of all people, a softer, but entirely unrelenting enemy out of indifference, but what a genius, what a giant, one who towers over Beethoven and Bruckner!”

By the open window of the house master's dwelling Wally, rosy cheeked in her high backed invalid's chair, smiled at Angelika who stood by her side, near the pale, shriveled face of the invalid. Her happy face hung shy and lovingly upon Angelika, the girl who was now my Frau.

Now that we had returned she straightened herself like a plant in the sun and she chatted. Yet in the evenings, in the twilight of the garden hall, Angelika said that we should have remained in the south.

“And my work?” I asked.

“And I,” added Richard in reproach, his face expressionless.

“I have such unrest in me,” she said, even at the piano.

She raised the cover from the keys, allowing a soft wave of melody to glide through the evening, a lullaby perhaps. She sang of gondolas, the sobbing of water on black impaling stakes.

We had followed her into the dream, when she suddenly cried out and stood up candle straight with a collapse of tones. A man had come in from the garden up to the cottage door.

“Excuse me. I heard playing . . . music is a magnet which I cannot resist.”

I wanted to give the stranger a piece of my mind with strong words. Richard beat me to it.

“Master Jericho, is it you?”

The short master came inside with a bow, awkward as a hermit. He wore a bright yellow tennis uniform with blue stripes, strange enough for an old man, a straw hat with a blue band; in his button hole a little twig of bleeding heart blossoms. A black pince nez covered his eyes. His hand in a white cotton glove covered Angelika's fingers for a long time:

“You have so much music in you . . . as much as few other people. Ashen in her white dress, Angelika pressed away from him against the

black piano. The little red hearts dangled against his coat collar. It was an honor, this visit, but an uncomfortable honor. Even though Angelika didn't want to play anymore he pleaded with her—to have so much music in her body. Angelika, stiff with terror in the darkness, was as far away from him as possible. She silently refused.

“In front of such a master!” declared Richard and then asked him whether he would not rather play himself. The organist laughed in little bleats.

“You will be disappointed. My instrument is the organ.”

But he had already pulled off the cotton gloves, laid his great paws on the keys. They were unspeakably ugly hands, shapeless shovels with fingers like claws, strong nails on the ends with black dirt underneath. He began to play, but what he played was wood and leather, harsh, tense, metallic stuff without any soul; it was segmented piano music without the harmony he almost painfully appeared to be striving for. He bent over; fumbling with his claws, but the piano defended itself, pushed him back, and enclosed its deeper song inside itself. He finished with hard, jarring notes, bleated his pushing laugh and let the cover fall roughly over the keys.

“Enough, I told you my instrument was the organ. Come to the church sometime when I am playing.”

He patted Angelika's hand again. The little hearts dangled against his jacket collar. With a bow he lurched out the door. Angelika's hands were cold as ice in mine:

“Lock the door,” she cried out dejectedly, her first sound since the entrance of the master. A cough shook her, as if her old, evil illness had crept up again. In the night she yelled out in her sleep with an abrupt cry of pain. The man, Master Jericho, had been in her dreams. She was his instrument. Strings were stretched through her body, on which he scrabbled out assaulting harmonies with crooked claws.

The beautiful serene cheerfulness, the feeling of returning health that the south had given on the way home, had disintegrated like worn down tinder. I saw it during the next days. Angelika wore a wasting away,

tired melancholy through the house and garden, and only smiled to please me. Richard's flirtations, which she always responded to with lusty joshing, now passed unnoticed. At the invalid's chair of the housemaster's daughter where she had always brought confidence, there was now anguish, despite the pleading that was in Wally's eyes.

"What's wrong with you?" I asked. —

"I don't know. There is an unquiet in me."

She never failed to go to church on Sundays. Master Jericho's playing pulled at her; it was inside her like an inescapable passion. It streamed through her in light headedness. The storming tones of wanton annihilation and despair drove her ever deeper into darkness.

I felt how she became more distant from me.

"Go back to the south," urged Richard, despite that it would be difficult for him to be without us. This decision had been germinating within me for a long time as well.

"We travel the day after tomorrow," I said.

With wide open eyes Angelika drew away from me as if I had been declared an enemy. I now saw so clearly how important it was to get her away from here, where she was fading like an outgoing light. I remained insistent and began all the preparations for travel. But the evening before departure I found Angelika in the garden hall, unconscious on the floor in a pool of red blood. Her disease had returned more strongly than ever with convulsions of fever that quickly drove the last strength from out of her body.

Painful experience will quickly tell. She died. Wally had slipped from out of her invalid's chair onto Angelika's bed. Angelika wobbled as she attempted to help care for her and sat there for a long time. She related what had happened. For her it was a glad misfortune, the need and horror of the account wove a space around her in which to feel better about her own fate.

What had happened in the city might happen to Angelika as well. On the night of her death Angelika spoke to me as if from a far distance.

“Promise to watch over my grave,” she pleaded. “I consoled myself with false hope thinking to ward this off. Now I too must die, but I will have my rest. It will not tear me out of my grave like so many others have now been torn: The old colonel, Herr Helvetius, the hunchback Teresa, the pastor himself . . .”

“A lunatic,” I flung out.

“Promise me,” she pleaded and her voice had the old vibrant, sweet warmth, which was impossibly endearing.

She died.

How badly I kept my promise; crushed by a mountainous burden of pain; my brain no longer functioned, my breast filled with a cancer, a giant animal with a hundred poisonous claws; my ears heard nothing other than the sounds of the clods hitting the coffin. I smelled only withered flowers and frankincense; I tasted only putrefaction. Unable to think or do anything, I let the hours slip away, a viscous porridge of day and night.

On the morning after the burial it was still dawn; a hand grabbed me hard and shook me into consciousness. A bellowing voice raged beside of me. Richard’s face hung over me ashen, a volcano of terror and rage.

“Man! Man! The grave . . . her grave . . .”

We ran. I, in the lead, spurred on ahead, pounding heavily like a worn out plunging star. There was her grave dug up from out of the ground and upended by a giant mole. The coffin was torn apart. Angelika’s body was pressed in between the sundered boards. The grave clothing over her breast was torn, and her breast, still as white and beautiful as ever, was horribly torn apart, as if by a clawed animal. The clothing and flesh clung together in tatters. From the bud of her punctured left breast, under the cambric and flesh, gaped a hole, black and red.

Many people were looking at me; I sensed the pull of their gaze in the depths of my horror.

Someone said, “It tore her heart out . . . like the others . . .”

Someone laid a sheet over her body. They lifted it up and carried it away, into the charnel house.

Someone said again, “That beast! That Satan! They should flay him alive!”

And a rough voice, “No one wishes that!”

It tore her heart out; that rang in me; tore her heart out like the others. Was that still Angelika that they carried away, that maimed, desecrated body? Was that her? It chuckled and chirped inside me, I was a bubble spewing tumescent swamp, and I saw a black mouth appear inside me covered with liquid manure. A maw with black lips that rose, sucked in air, smacked, gulped and disappeared, and came back, and ducked and came back again . . .

Then thunder stormed, resounding thunder. The saints from the pointed arch of the church portal descended over me and whispered together:

“There he goes; the one who has torn the heart out of this woman.”

I don’t know how I came to the church. I felt Richard beside me. Breaking waves surged around us, a white storm of zealous eagerness and purification, radiantly searing these protuberances of indignation against God:

Master Jericho was playing the organ. Then the spirit of the demon that was there above, sank, crawled into a snake hole, ravaged by the poison of contriteness. It pushed its belly over the earth and devoured itself. It flared dully and from beneath the ground, all that had been inside it gushed forth from out of its gullet into the heights. Then a human sobbing began; a voice in fear of eternity, a tearful complaint of inner brokenness and cowardliness.

But there, from the un-stormed heights, from out of the light, floated down a tinctured silvery promise, a voice full of comfort and unearthly clarity.

“Do you hear?” asked Richard clawing at me.

I saw an old knight in front of me, a stony margrave under a dripstone canopy, and halfway up on the pillar, where my gaze hung. He too, turned his head and stood listening, released from his rigidity.

“Yes, it is Angelika’s voice,” I said.

She was hovering in bliss, returned in some mysterious way and behind her was a shower of swooping, newly freed wings fulfilled in their longing for the cloud covered mountain of redemption.

A strange brightness came over me. I had become so dull during those last days that I had not even been living. The following events stood out clearly from moment to moment in my brain. I now had a calling which I had to follow, which had been placed upon me.

Angelika’s corpse was newly consecrated and buried. The police troubled themselves very little over what had happened. But that was not what I was waiting for. The black cloud of death still hung over our house and now it descended on Wally, to whom my Angelika had given her last joy and strength. The summer sun stood high and radiated over the entire world as we laid her away. Her mound lay next to Angelika’s.

“Tonight!” I said to Richard and he nodded, “Tonight!”

Toward evening we slipped into the charnel house, on whose wall St. Christopher threatened in the twilight. I sat on my knees next to a window slit; a peephole that looked out between the bushes, over the field of mounds that had been desecrated so often. It didn’t take long for daylight to fade. Then we saw the northern lights stretched in a half bow across the heavens with fringes hanging on the ends toward the darkening heavens, filling the chamber with streaming, colored lights. Trees rubbed their bark together with a thud, like animals dreaming. Living brutes rustled out of all the holes in the earth of the cemetery. Plump from the flesh of the dead, the

rats of the charnel house skittered around behind us. We stayed that way without feeling for a time, a very long time. The charm of our stupid adventure had long since gone dull. But we were the doomed, not the adventurers. The northern lights had long since burned out, when Richard's wristwatch glowed half past one o'clock.

Then something hunched over slipped among the graves, as if from out of the ground, something unfriendly in the night. We knew all the plump predators around us, but they had been strongly taught to not approach us.

All too often the spook had melted away from the night watch and the police. Then a scrabbling began over there, soundless, only our intuition betrayed what must be happening. We wanted to know what was going to happen to the heart. The waiting was painful with pounding nerves and tense muscles, prepared to leap.

"Now," we said and took up the chase on our bellies behind gravestones until we came to the last row where Wally was my Angelika's neighbor. The clods still flew; a sniffing head came up and went back down again. Nausea and horror wanted to climb up my throat. I choked my terror back down. Then something coughed over there in the renewed darkness. Wood cracked under the bite of iron. Grunting it rooted around in human flesh. I held a rusty iron cross clutched with both hands. I had let go of my cane with the lead tip.

A man stood upright over the exhumed grave. Then came the moment when the rabbit always slipped away. We let him go, our breath whistled in our lungs; we strained our eyes looking, but we didn't lose him. For a nerve racking moment he stood in the light in front of the cemetery wall, then came the creaking of the little door to the sacristy of the church. We jumped up and took after him. The old door with its iron bands and assorted flickering dragon heads locked closed in front of us.

We went up to the sexton and sent him around the church to open the door for us. The eternal lamp burned the distinct red of propylene in the darkness. The stairs to the organ loft creaked under a step. A gleam of light slid down the stairs to us. We planted our feet into the old wood, silently . . .

There, standing on a ladder that had been erected next to the organ pipes, was the organist, Master Jericho, striving with something unrecognizable. Equal pulse beats threw us forward at the same time. We tore down the ladder and fell upon the gibbering man. I clenched two hands around his throat. A bite gnashed my finger. Then the lead knob struck the death blow, breaking his teeth apart and landing against his temple with a dull thud.

The ancient forest of the pipe organ stood in sloping, glittering metallic erectness arranged in bundles according to size from the oak sized trunk of the deep to the bamboo thickness of the high voices. From out of the *Vox humana* mouth hole protruded a clotted piece of human flesh, a clump of muscle—a human heart.

We set the ladder back up and put our arms into the pipes. There were human hearts shoved into all of them, strung on long wires through the silvery tubes so that the wind could blow around them; old dried out hearts parched like shriveled plums, like leather; then brown, solid, plump ones. But others were rose colored, seemingly fresh.

A very soft, silvery sigh drifted to us from the high voices. I staggered to the pipe of the *Vox angelica* and pulled a heart out of it. It was a young, fresh, rosy heart that looked as if it could start beating again. The heart of my Angelika . . .

“Is that finally you?”

It throbbed in my hand.

The Manuscript of Juan Serrano

On his last South American voyage Professor Osten-Seckher, the renowned explorer of the upper Amazon jungle and of the bordering Peruvian Andes, made a most remarkable discovery. He succeeded in finding an old manuscript in the remote and difficult to reach cloister of Santa Esperanza somewhere in the heights of Mont-Blanc. It gave information on one of the many heroes that in ancient times helped in the discovery and conquest of the earth. It was written by Juan Serrano, one of the participants in Magellan's first circumnavigation of the earth, and of whose end nothing had been known up til now.

It was only known that he appeared on the beach of the island of Zubu after a bloody feast in which the other participants were slaughtered, and that he pleaded with his companions, who had remained on ship, "for the sake of God and the Holy Virgin", to pay his ransom so that he could be released from the savages. But even though he, wounded, covered with blood, tightly bound, and clothed only with a shirt was such a pathetic sight, and even though the ransom price of two rifles, two bars of metal and a length of rope could have been achieved, the commander Juan Carvajo, refused to free him and gave the command to set sail.

Pigasetta, whom we have to thank for a diary about Magellan's voyage, thought that Carvajo left Serrano in the hands of the savages so that he would not have to turn over the command to his captain again; but perhaps it was also because he feared further betrayal from the islanders.

In the preliminary remarks it can be noticed that this took place on May 1, 1521 and that a few days earlier—on April 27—Magellan, on the island of Matan, near Zubu, lost his own life under the spears and howls of savages.

Professor Osten-Seckher was not able to find out how the manuscript of Juan Serrano came to the cloister of Santa Esperanza. One might be permitted to assume that some Spanish sailor at a later time found

the manuscript with some natives and was permitted to bring it back from South America, where it came into the possession of the cloister at Santa Esperanze.

And now let us read the manuscript itself in the best possible translation as follows:

“In the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

I, Juan Serrano, first captain of the ‘Santiago’ and then later the ‘Concepcion’, write these lines in the face of impending death, without hope that it might ever be read by any of my countrymen. If, by God’s grace, and through a miracle, my manuscript should ever be read by a Spaniard or a Portuguese (against whom I carry no grudge, especially since I am Portuguese from birth), he might be able to glean from it how much the devil is able to achieve in the temptation of us poor sinners; how weak we are and how strange our lives and deaths may be. And perhaps then he might say a prayer for my poor soul, if at all possible in the church of Maria de la Victoria de Triana in Sevilla, where Magellan received the royal standard from out of the hands of Sancho Martinez de Leiva.

After the slaughter of my companions through the betrayal of the king of Zubu I was led to the beach, but even though I pleaded and begged as strongly as I could, they would not pay my ransom, and I had to watch, as my companions set sail and turned the bow of their ship away from land. And this happened, even though Juan Carvajo was my godson and had sworn with upraised hand on the memory of his mother and on the wounds of Christ, that he would not deliver me to certain death on this island. When I saw that my pleas were not able to make them come back, I fell into a terrible rage and despair and began to curse Spain, my companions, and myself; and I asked God, if He on the earliest Day of Judgment would hold Juan Carvao accountable for the condition of my soul. And I also hoped that my curse might soon bring sickness and death to this horrible and criminal man, my godson.

So I remained behind alone on the island of Zubu and was once more led into the village by my captors, so their king could decide what to do with me. And there was a large crowd of people around me, of women

and children, who threw dirt, shells and stones at me, beating my face and forehead bloody. I was determined to show these people that I was not afraid, was prepared to die, and walked upright between my guards. So we came to the large hut of the king, where the banquet had been arranged and where we had been captured.

A number of stakes had been driven into the earth around the hut, and the bodies of my companions had been impaled upon their tips. As we entered I saw the king lounging on his bed and near him was a human body lying stretched out on the ground. In passing I recognized Duarte Barbosa, who like me had only been wounded in the capture.

The body of my companion was cut open, so that I could see the inside of his belly and intestines. The king kept putting both hands into the body cavity, tearing out fistfuls of fat and shoving it into his mouth. But Duarte Barbosa was still alive and moaned and whimpered so pitifully; and as he looked at me, he begged me by all the saints and eternal salvation, to kill him. But he could just as well have been begging a stone or a rafter in the hut, because my hands were tied and there was even another rope tied around my arms, which was tied so tightly that I thought my shoulders would pop out of their joints.

I really can't leave it unmentioned that Duarte Barbosa himself had inflamed the hatred of the savages—which I must call them, even though they have all received the holy baptism—by much too strongly chasing after the women of the island, as was his way, and they had been much too willing as well. This rage of the savages had not broken out before because Magellan had kept them subdued with his look and his words.

In the meantime the king turned to me and said a few words in his language. Then Henrique, Magellan's slave from Malakka, stepped up. He had followed his master from Portugal and Spain and after that almost all around the entire earth until he was once more near his homeland; but after Magellan's death he had fallen away from us.

Henrique, who understood the language of the Zebu and served as our translator, translated the words of the king to me, in which he said, that I could see from the behavior of my companions how disloyal and

traitorous a people the Spaniards were, and that they had left me behind out of fear of him. That irritated me and I contradicted him, again through the mouth of Henrique, and said that he himself had given the worst example of disloyalty and betrayal, when he had sworn an oath to Magellan, to be obedient and subservient to the king of Spain. He had through God's gracious providence received holy baptism and renounced his former pagan name, Rajah Humabon, and replaced it with the proud name 'Carlo' after our royal majesty; which he himself afterwards appeared entirely unworthy of; so much so that I could do nothing else, despite his baptism, than consider him a despicable heathen and idolater.

At that the king only grimaced and replied that his royal majesty Karl V was of no concern to him. He did not care and I only had to look over at my companion, Duarte Barbosa, to see what was going to happen to me next. Then he clapped his hands and two girls entered. They were only clothed with little skirts of leaves around their hips and wore veils on their heads. One of them held a knife of stone in her hand and slowly danced around the bloody body of Duarte Barbosa, until the king gave a signal, at which she knelt down and plunged the blade of her knife into the heart of the poor man. His whimpering immediately ceased, and I offered up a prayer in the name of my patron, as thanks, that Barbosa was finally released from his suffering.

I was led out of the hut. As I passed the stakes with the bodies of my companions I counted and found that there were twenty one of them. It immediately occurred to me that one was missing. Twenty seven of us had come ashore and of these Juan Carvajo and the ship's master-at-arms had immediately returned, because they didn't trust these creatures. Henrique had gone over to the enemies; Barbosa still lay in the hut; I was still alive, and apparently the twenty second must be as well.

I didn't have time to notice or determine anything else because I was quickly led past and thrown into a hut, where they tied me so tightly to a post, that the blood was soon oozing from out of my skin.

Toward evening the so called Henrique again came to me, sat down across from me and began to tell me how they were going to kill me and how much the population of the entire island would enjoy this celebration.

At that his eyes glowed so terribly and his features became so distorted, that it seemed as if Satan himself was looking at me. And then he told me, how he, with the help of the four remaining kings of Zubu, had arranged the treachery and given Rajah Humabon counsel; and how happy he was to finally have his revenge for being taken away from his homeland and for his enslavement. That was when I realized that this slave as well, even though he had long since been baptized and wore a Christian name, was nothing other than another heathen.

He left me at night fall, and two girls came into the hut; the first was the one that had killed Duarte Barbosa. They sat to the left and to the right of me, with their stone knives in their hands, and I understood that they were designated as my guards. But in front of the hut I could still hear the voices of the men and knew they were being very careful to prevent an escape. But I was so weak from the loss of so much blood, from a blow over the head which I had received, one that had nearly crushed my skull; that I could not even once think about making an attempt for my freedom. Because I was so weak I soon fell asleep despite my bounds, and a good dream showed me the beautiful city of Sevilla, and I went with Donna Mercedes across to the church of Santa Maria de la Victoria: once Donna Mercedes lifted her hand and caressed me so softly and lovingly over my face that I became highly confused and wondered why she did this.

But then I awoke from harsh screams like the screeching of a giant bird, and as I came to my senses, I noticed two things; that these screeches were coming from above my head at the top of the hut and that a soft and warm hand was still lovingly caressing my face. But there was so much darkness in the hut that I could not make out whose hand it belonged to, except that it must belong to one of my guards, because no one other than a woman is able to caress so softly and lovingly.

Meanwhile the cries from the roof continued and they were such horrible and uncanny screeches that the dogs around the hut panicked and began to howl as if in fear. It was not long before the caressing stopped, and both girls spoke to each other in the darkness, then they began a soft singing that penetrated miraculously into my heart, strengthened my soul like a sweet refreshment and almost drove tears into my eyes. As the screeches on

the roof became silent and only this song continued, a deep sleep soon came over me and didn't leave until the light of morning.

With sunrise my guards left and in their place came four of the king's warriors with lances and clubs, who tested my bonds, to see if they had loosened. Henrique brought me some bread and a roasted hen, which he pushed into my mouth piece by piece, so that I could eat and regain my strength, in order, as he said, to prolong my death, which he again described in a horrible way. I ate and refused to give him any response when he once more inquired if I knew where the priest Pedro de Valderrama was hiding, who to his memory had also come ashore. But my thoughts were only directed toward the night that was coming soon and waiting to see if it would bring any more soft caresses and comforting songs.

With nightfall the darkness came again as well as both of the girls with the stone knives, then the warriors left, so I thought that it must be the custom with these heathens, and it occurred to me that my two guards were perhaps some type of priestesses, like those in many of the tribes in the lands that the Portuguese had discovered.

But they only spoke with each other and didn't even look at me. After they had sat down to my left and to my right, the one on my right prepared a drink for me, which she mixed together from various vessels. She said something over it and then they both drank as well.

I was determined not to fall asleep, so that I could find out which of them was friendly towards me. But I had to wait a long time, until midnight, before I felt a hand on my arm. Slowly the hand slid up to my neck, and I sensed once more the coldness of the stone knife on my throat, so that I was terribly frightened and realized that I was to die in the darkness. But the knife cut the rope that lay around my neck and made it difficult to breathe and to swallow. Then the ropes around my arms and legs were cut so that I was once more free. But I didn't move, because I thought, this same hand that had freed me, would give me a signal of what I had to do.

After a short time the same horrible and miserable screeching as yesterday began again on the roof of the hut, and even the dogs began to howl and whine again. In front of the hut was raised a murmur of voices

and a clattering of weapons, and then I heard the steps of many men running away into the distance. After a long time I felt a hand seize mine with a tug and a sign for me to understand. I was to get up, which I immediately did, in order to blindly follow my guide. We crawled through a hole in the wall at the back end of the hut, and I inhaled the night air with great joy. It was so dark that I could not distinguish anything of my guide other than her figure and streaks of white. It was a color with which all the women of Zubu painted their breasts and legs and which now glowed a little under the free light of the heavens.

We slipped away between the huts of the village towards a mountain, until we came to a forest. Here we took a short rest, and the girl began to softly speak, but I couldn't answer her in any other way than in Spanish and I thanked her for rescuing me. Then we went further, and as we came out of the forest near daybreak; we found ourselves in the light of the just risen moon and took shelter on a broad, grass covered plain. In the same light I recognized my guide as the girl that had sat near me on my right. What happened to the other, I would only learn later, and will only say what I suspected at the time, namely, that she had been given something in her drink, which she ingested and it put her into a deep sleep.

The travel through the high grass of the plain was difficult and troublesome for me once my head with its wound and my swollen feet were exposed to the rays of the sun. When my little girl became aware that I could scarcely continue, she made a rest by running water, washing my wound and bandaging it with her veil. Then she took some herbs, and anointed the irritated places on my feet and wrists with the sap, after which I almost immediately felt more comfortable and stronger, so that I could soon continue on further.

On this trail I found many flowers whose leaves were alive. These leaves consisted of two parts that clapped together like wings, and they sat with short, pointed stems on the branches. At the other end they had a red thorn. When they sensed a human, they pulled away, and a little stick flew through the air as well, and when they were driven into a tight corner, they turned around and stabbed with the red thorn, no different than an animal. But they really were leaves, and I believe that they lived upon the air.

Toward evening we climbed the steep mountain and at twilight came to a narrow ravine which we had to wander through for perhaps an hour. From this we stepped out onto a level plain, whose grass spread out in front of us like a carpet. Again it was so dark that I had to take my guide by the hand, meanwhile we came across some stone ruins that looked like pillars or arches, so that a person might think they had found themselves in a destroyed city.

Night fell upon us, after which we ate several fruit, which my girl brought from the nearby growing bushes, without a fire next to a large heap of stones, and there I became very tired and only awoke late the next day. As I looked around me, I realized that I had not been deceived last night. We really were in the ruins of a city with the remains of walls and towers and pillars and fountains. What I had not been able to notice in the darkness was that these ruins and rubble were all of pure gold, so that they shone and gleamed in the sun, as if we were standing in brilliant flames. Now it was well known to us that this metal was considered common on our discovered island and of little value. Magellan had to strongly forbid us to not seem too greedy for gold or to place a great value on it, so the savages would not know how valuable and expensive it was to us. But I had not thought such an empire possible in these lands. In comparison to the huts of bark and cane down below on the beach, these golden ruins seemed to have been built by another people and—even though I was no expert—I would venture to maintain, that the city must have been built before the great flood. In the rubble there were also many gigantic statues of gods, standing and sitting, with eyes of jewels and rings on their fingers, of which one alone, was worth an entire house in Sevilla, like the one that Donna Mercedes lived in.

As I learned the speech of the land from Salaja, that was the girl's name, I learned from her that her countrymen knew of this city very well, but they avoided the area because they considered it occupied by devils. At my question, why Salaja had come here with me despite this belief of her folk, she smiled at me and kissed me on the mouth, as I had taught her that was what the Spanish women did. I must here confess that Salaja had become my wife, after I realized that she had taken on all dangers and the rage of her own people because she loved me.

And if anyone should find this manuscript, I don't want you to think that I had taken some ugly Negress to wife. I must clarify that the women of Zubu were almost as white as our women, that in youth they had smooth and tender skin and that their voices were very soft and gentle, so that you could listen to their songs with great pleasure.

At first my Salaja wore large pieces of wood in her ears like all the others and painted herself with red and white mud, but she put the wooden earrings away and stopped painting herself after I told her once that I was not fond of that kind of decoration. She was compliant and competent in all things and did everything according to my will, so that I often wondered a little if she really was the one that pushed the stone knife into the breast of Duarte Barbosa.

We lived in the golden city, whose surroundings gave us an abundance of fruit and animals, for a long time without moving, almost for six months, unbothered and without having to suffer the rigor of the heavens in this hot and happy stretch of land. And while in the beginning I thought of my own travels and my homeland with longing and homesickness, I later forgot them from day to day, living even more only for corporal things, just like a plant or animal. And I do not want to say what might have become of me and to what level of forgetfulness the devil might have brought me even further, if something hadn't happened one day, which I will relate in the following. (NB. But sometimes it seems to me, that this early time could not have been under the sign of Satan, and furthermore, that which happened later, seems to have been on his instigation and led to an evil game. So that I am now in great confusion and my soul is still in no way clear about what I should make of all these things. That is why I desire this once just before my death, to raise a sincere prayer to my patron in heaven, so that perhaps death will be easier for my soul, so things will not be so painful and I will no longer be so full of doubt and confusion.)

So it was perhaps half a year after my liberation and we had still not seen any other people, when one morning Salaja had scarcely gone out, when she came rushing back into our house of twigs and bushes. She cried that she had seen someone in the bushes and slinking around the ruins. I immediately followed her to a hidden spot and there we saw a human who

crept through the bushes so carefully in the twilight that I only got one glimpse and could no longer make him out.

Then I seized my spear, on which I had fastened a blade of stone, to kill this other person if he came any nearer. But as he stepped out of the shadows I recognized our chaplain Pedro ed Valderrama, whom I had believed murdered with the others. His clothing was very torn, his face was framed with a wild beard, but he stood there alive in front of me, and while I was watching him, he looked around and his glance fell upon our golden ruins. Then he sank to his knees and raised his hands high, as if in prayer, at which point I stepped up and greeted him. But he screamed out loud, fell down and hid his face between his hands, so that I had to speak with him for a long time and tell him that I really was Juan Serrano, his companion. Later I realized that his terror was not so remarkable, since I had not been wearing my shirt during my flight, and after that Salaja had woven me a skirt out of bark and leaves, so that I, with unshaven head, beard and burned from the sun, appeared like a savage.

The chaplain was almost still more astonished over the golden city in which we lived than he was over me and he said that all the riches of previously discovered lands could not compare to these treasures. He picked up clumps of gold and carried them in all his pockets, which he always took out and examined, as if there was not enough of this metal lying all around.

After we had brought him to our hut, he explained that he had been saved by Cilatun, a brother of the king, the same one, whom he had brought back to health through baptism and prayer. This man had been very ill when we had come to the island, and had not spoken for four days. The magicians and priests of the gods could not prevail over the illness, but immediately after baptism and after Don Pedro said a prayer over him he had felt better and in a short time was completely healed. Out of thankfulness Cilatun had then spared the chaplain's life by leading him to his own house, from where he had then escaped into the forest and later to this lonely mountain.

I was overjoyed at finding one of my companions, but Salaja was silent and troubled, as if Don Pedro was not very welcome to her, so much so that I had to console her. During the night after Don Pedro's arrival I

again heard the horrible and miserable screech of a bird near our hut, and when I became aware that Salaja was awake, I asked her what kind of bird it was. But I had to ask for a long time before she would give me an answer. This bird was the grimmest enemy of the whales, and when these came up from out of the deeps, in order to sleep with open mouths on the surface of the ocean, this bird would fly down to it, through the mouth, into the innards, tear its heart out with its sharp beak and kill it in this manner. But its scream was considered unholy. And that was why even the guards in front of the hut had run away that time. Then I asked her whether the screech of the bird was such an evil thing to her, whereupon she squeezed my hand and kissed me, as only a Spanish lady can kiss.

The next day Don Pedro clambered around in the ruins and came back in such great confusion that I noticed the prospect of so much gold must have climbed into his head. He spoke only of it, that these heaps of gold were immeasurable and with them a man could buy the entire Royal Empire of Castilla. That evening he went with me to a high place, from which you could see the plain overgrown with grass and look out over the endless ocean.

“What you could have with all this gold,” he said to me. “It lies here unused!” We are both the richest men in the world and will never enjoy any of our riches.”

And he continued on to paint for me, how a person could live in Sevilla, and how all the world would be amazed and serve you. But as I answered him, I declined to dwell upon it, because it was not possible and we would never be able to leave this island. To which he replied that he had already noticed that in living together with this woman I had lost all my incentive, yes, that I had even forgotten what the best way was, that of Christianity. He could not even imagine that Salaja had ever been baptized.

At which I replied that was quite possible, because Salaja was clothed with another a type of priestly dignity, one that all these people had renounced before being baptized.

Then he said that it was necessary for her to take up the Christian faith, because he could not endure that I continued living with a heathen

any longer as if in marriage. If I did not ask this of her she would still fall into hell and be thrown from the face of God.

I told him that I had not done this, because Salaja had saved me from death and I had not wanted to insult her.

Then he said what beautiful gratitude it was, that someone who saved me from death, would be given the prize of the spiritual death.

After that I agreed that I would request this of her and persuade her to be baptized.

After the words of Don Pedro and my own given promise I began trying to convince her with all my power to enter into the Christian community. Salaja didn't resist and said, although a little sad, that she would do what I desired; and so Don Pedro performed the baptism, gave her the name Theresa, and united us as well in Christian marriage.

After this happened, he began to zealously instruct her in the Christian faith. At the request of Don Pedro I erected a cross, made of two pieces of wood and bound with bark, at a place near the hut. We held our morning and evening services in front of this cross.

Don Pedro had brought a painting of the Madonna on a piece of wood and a prayer book along with him when he had come ashore. He had loyally guarded these sacred objects during his stay in the wilderness, and he read to us from out of this prayer book. I will remark at the same time that there were some empty pages bound in the back of the book; the same ones, on which you now find this manuscript, which I removed from their place much later.

Meanwhile the chaplain was not satisfied with Theresa's progress in the Christian faith. She was still as stubborn a heathen as always in her inner self and did not take the holy teachings seriously, especially since my presence distracted her so much that he had to ask me to no longer be present during the hour of instruction.

I now wanted Theresa to become a believer as soon as possible and relieve Don Pedro of the sustained effort and great enthusiasm with which

he brought forth threats against her bright soul. I followed his wishes and left him alone with Theresa for the hour of instruction. This led to no better end.

One day as I strolled through the forest near the hut I heard a loud scream coming from that direction and recognized Theresa's voice. I believed that Theresa had been attacked by a wild animal and hurriedly ran there. I found Theresa lying on her knees in front of the chaplain, who was pressing down on her wrist with his left hand, while holding out his right to strike a blow. As I came up he let his arm sink, but I recognized by his face, that he was in an exceptional rage and his anger was so strong that he was not able to speak at all. Finally he said that Theresa was so opposed to the holy truth, so stubborn and disruptive, that he had lost his Christian patience and been gripped by the impulse to punish her.

At this I said (because I found that Theresa understood me better than Don Pedro) that it was for me to punish her, it was my duty, and he only needed to tell me if she remained stubborn and disruptive. I would then find some way to reason with her.

But Don Pedro replied that he had given up all hope of making a true Christian out of Theresa and would not trouble himself about her any longer.

Theresa had not spoken during this argument, but in the night she moved to my side and asked whether I desired that she should give herself to the chaplain as a woman. Now I knew very well, that on the island of Zubu, the custom ruled, for the host to offer his friends and guests the women of the house. Our manhood had over zealously made use of this custom, and because of it a strong rage had developed in the men because they saw that the women preferred the strangers over themselves.

From Theresa's question I realized that Don Pedro's instruction in Christianity had not gone well and she was still not able to recognize the difference between being a savage or a Christian Spanish woman. The customs of her own land no longer applied to her. I made this plain, told her that she was now a Christian and must put away the customs of the heathen. Finally I also told her that as a priest, Don Pedro was a holy man, who had

renounced sexual intercourse with women. After that she didn't resist any further.

The chaplain really didn't trouble himself very much with Theresa's Christian education after that and remained hard and dark against her. But he became even more preoccupied with the thought of the great treasure in the golden city. Once more in his daily speech he spoke of Spain and Sevilla and reminded me of how I could buy old Donna Mercedes whatever her heart desired.

I really had been thinking more than ever about my homeland as well, and a great unrest came over me. We thought of making some kind of plan so that we could somehow leave here. I knew that Magellan had, in his last days, calculated that we could not be far from the lands of the Portuguese. The Islamic merchants who had discovered Zubu and traded goods with the king must have known about them as well, because they had told the king to guard himself against such men as us, as well as any others of the west.

We spent many hours talking together in counsel over what we could do, with the help of God and all the saints, to win past the Portuguese, who, even though an enemy of Spain would not leave us in the hands of the savages. The more we considered it, the more we thought that it would not do us any good and no plan came forward.

Even if we were to build a raft without the people of Zubu discovering it, we didn't have any charts and would need to sail without a compass. There was a greater chance of entering the throat of death than of life and our homeland.

We stood more and more often on the peak of the mountain and looked out over the ocean to see if we could discover a Portuguese ship. But nothing was to be seen, other than from time to time the sails of the heathen that were out catching fish. During such hours I could imagine my homeland perfectly, and I thought about Donna Mercedes, who had embraced me at my departure and whispered to me. I must return because our lives were entwined together.

Because I thought so much on my Donna and ever more perfectly imagined her features, it happened that one evening I discovered in the Madonna painting, which Pedro held up for me, a great similarity between these features and those of my beloved. We had just spoken more of our escape, and Pedro had pulled out the portrait and held it out for me to kiss. After I had discovered this similarity he said that he trusted in the intercession of the mother of God. And it seemed to me to be a good omen for our plans, so much so, that I became entirely happy in my heart and began to hope more strongly than ever before. I also told Pedro of my newly established hope and he agreed with me that the similarity between the mother of God and my beloved could be looked at as a good omen.

The following night, as I lay there sleepless and thoughtful, it occurred to me, whether it would be possible to steal one of the boats of the natives and flee in it with some lumps of gold. Theresa knew where the boats lay hidden, and at night she would be taken for one of the women of the village by the designated guards. She could untie one of them and bring it to a place where we could climb in.

But when we talked this plan over the next day and found it a good one, Theresa resisted us and would not agree to do it. She said that she would never do it. I must here now mention that a great transformation had come over Theresa. While she had earlier always been passionately inclined to speak, she had now become quiet and thoughtful. When we spoke of our escape and our homeland, she crouched on the floor and watched us with a dark countenance. Especially after she realized that I longed to go back to Mercedes, and she clearly showed that she was against our plans.

Then, with the newly awoken memory of my beloved in Sevilla, I became increasingly aware of the difference between Mercedes and Theresa. How much softer and lighter my Spanish beloved's skin was, how much more slender her hips and how much finer and silkier her hair. How easy it was to treasure Mercedes, and the strange and exciting love caresses that she knew, which Theresa didn't know anything about. So it came about that I was hard and annoyed many times when these differences were so perfectly presented before my eyes.

I also cried out loud to her that she had to obey me, and would not even consider letting her contradict me. At that she stood up and said that she would never lift a hand to help me return to my homeland and to Donna Mercedes. Then Don Pedro began to yell at her as well and exclaimed how could she dare, even take the name of Donna in her mouth; and that in comparison to the Spanish lady, she was nothing more than the dust at her feet. And to make her feel even lower, he put the painting of the Madonna right in front of her eyes and said that my beloved looked like the mother of God herself. Then Theresa gripped the portrait with both hands, pulled it close and looked at it for a long time with a wild expression on her face; one that I had never seen before, not even the time when she had stabbed her knife into the chest of Duarte Barbosa.

Then she gave the picture back to the chaplain and ran out of the hut. She didn't come back home for the entire day and was not in front of the cross that evening for prayers, which until then she had always done together with us. She came back later that night and the next morning I gave her a good talking to and chastised her with hard words.

Then Don Pedro showed a great rage over this absence and said that we must now pray even more zealously than ever and use the opportunity to beseech the Lord so that he would not deny us his help.

Theresa remained silent and defiant during my performance and immediately ran away, again not to return for the entire day. Then I was seized with a great rage, when she again was not present at the evening service. I was of the same opinion as Don Pedro, that it would go bad for us, if we allowed this disloyal soul to once more return to the devil. When I saw that I could not bring her to the services before the cross with threats, I hit her with a stick which Pedro had cut for me from a bush.

But she stood and let herself be beaten, without complaining, and even though I was so anxious to force her into a pious experience through pain, I finally had to stop. The bright blood ran over her back, and even though I was so annoyed over her abhorrent stubbornness, I still had compassion for her.

Once more we had to pray without her, and Don Pedro set me straight that through the stubbornness of this heathen our hopes became even smaller. I said that I would like to try once more to win her back on our side. But Theresa gave no opportunity for that, because she only came back into the hut that night, so softly that she didn't disturb our sleep, and was long gone with the morning light. This continued for three days. On the fourth day Don Pedro came and told me that he feared Theresa had entirely fallen away from the Christian faith and returned to the devil. He had found fresh fruit and flowers in front of one of the idols in the ruins as an offering, and they could not have been put there by anyone else but Theresa. Then he led me to the idol and I found it was true, as he had said.

It was one of the abominable idols with four legs and five arms, of which the fifth grew from out of its belly. On its head it wore a feather headdress with a torn out bird's beak, and if you looked at it closely, you could see that every feather was held in place by a little skull. Then I was seized with horror that Theresa could believe in such a terrible superstition after she had been baptized. Don Pedro thought that we should hide and surprise her when she came back with another offering.

So we lay there in the bushes for several hours, until we heard steps and saw Theresa coming with flowers and fruit. We waited until she had laid down her offering and begun to dance, as was the custom of all peoples when they want to honor their gods; then we jumped out at the same and Pedro seized her on the arm and dragged her down to her knees.

"Miserable idol worshiper!" he cried. "You vessel of sin, you bride of Satan! How can you stain your soul that has been purified through baptism in such an abominable way? You deserve to be immediately thrown into the abyss of hell, to be shut out from all grace and mercy!"

And I added, how could she give herself so completely into the hands of the evil one, when she had told me herself that her own people believed the devil lived here in the golden ruins.

But she cried in her language, "Really, this belief is true. The devil does live in these ruins, and there he stands."

She pointed at the chaplain, who became very frightened at these evil words of the heathen Theresa and stepped back.

But he scarcely pulled himself back together, when he cried that he wanted to drive the demon out of Theresa, and that he had no greater desire, that he could no longer endure such a horrible and fearsome spirit so close by. And Theresa needed to see that her idol was nothing other than putrid smoke and fumes before the breath of the Lord.

At that he commanded me to help him and grabbed onto the hand of the idol and broke it off. After that we brought some rope and poles and with considerable effort succeeded so that the statue tumbled to the ground with a dull thud. At first Theresa covered her head, as if she didn't want to watch. Then we went further, through the entire ruins, and to the honor of God, threw all the idols, twenty five in all, down from their pedestals.

But during the night a horrible crashing arose over our heads and a rumbling in the earth, so that the ground began to sway like a ship and our hut was immediately torn apart, as if the poles were thin reeds. We ran out, and then saw a great flame on the top of the highest mountain and a reflection like blood surrounding us in all the rubble. There was a screeching and shrieking in the air as if from a thousand voices; as if all the spirits in hell were descending upon us. The ruins of the golden city rolled around each other, so that they gave off loud noises as they crashed together.

A large boulder fell from out of the sky right in front of Don Pedro and almost hit him. Theresa began laughing at that, and it was so frightening to hear, that Don Pedro approached her. She was to remain silent and feel the blessed holy Virgin in her soul.

One time we saw a red, glowing cloud protrude from the tip of the mountain and rush down over the cliff, and then the cloud balled together and became even redder. It took a course straight towards us and came up so swiftly, that we were scarcely aware of the danger as it wrapped around us. It was only for a moment, but we believed we were going to breath fire and that we were going to burn. Then it was past us, and to our astonishment, we remained unharmed. After this outburst it became calmer

in the air and in the earth, and finally during the first morning hours we were able to lie down to sleep.

In the morning, with Theresa's help, I rebuilt our broken hut again as quickly as I could, while Don Pedro went out to see what had happened during the night, particularly because the ground was all broken in pieces with wide, deep fissures and cracks showing. But I had not been working very long when Don Pedro came running up so distraught and out of breath, that I believed he must have encountered something especially horrible. He took me by the hand, led me to a large golden block that lay close by the hut and asked me to touch it. I did, and it seemed to me as if I grabbed at a yielding mass, and the gold crumbled beneath my fingers, transformed into dust and trickled down to the ground. And as Don Pedro pounded with his fist against the block, it collapsed entirely and became nothing more than a collapsed heap of ash.

Then, after some consideration, I said that this proved we had been wrong, that we had mistaken it for real gold and that it must have been destroyed during the night through some chemical reaction from the glowing cloud.

But Don Pedro threw himself to the ground, beat himself with his fists and screamed so loudly that I thought he had fallen in a fit of cramps. Finally he got up, led me to the side and said that now it was unfortunately very clear and proven without a doubt, that this female, who lived with us, was a wicked witch and a sorceress, which we had to chase away or free her from demon for the salvation of our own souls.

I could not believe this at first, but Don Pedro proved to me how everything hung together; how Theresa herself had at first refused to pray with us; how she had sacrificed to the idol and how the terror of the past night had been called up with the help of infuriated demons after the pedestal had been destroyed. This was finally followed by the destruction of our great treasure.

I had to agree that there was something to his argument, and agreed to question Theresa about it. But instead of Theresa answering Don Pedro, she turned to me and spoke. She said that she no longer wanted to conceal

from me how the chaplain hounded her with his hatred. She had remained silent up to now, to cause no problems between us, but now she wanted to tell me that she hated Don Pedro, and because of that she was not willing to do what I asked.

Then Don Pedro rang his hands and lifted them up to the heavens.

“Brother,” he cried, “now you can see for yourself how wide the abyss of this evil castoff creature reaches, that she even dares place me in shameful suspicion, in order to steer us away from her own shameful deeds. I must profess that these are all stinking, hellish and low down lies, concocted by the demon that is inside her.

I myself was frightened at Theresa’s evil shamefulness and agreed with Don Pedro, that we must castigate her in the name of the Lord, in order to drive the devil out of her. We tied Theresa to a pole and I struck her with a rod; but after a while Don Pedro said that I was becoming too tired and not strong enough in my blows. Then I turned Theresa over to the chaplain, and he went to work with a great zealousness. After three blows from a thumb sized rod, Pedro held the picture of the Madonna up to her, to test her, to see whether the devil had left her yet. But Theresa refused to kiss the picture. She said that nothing could compel her to show reverence to my beloved.

Then we saw that she had still not been cleansed of the demon, and Don Pedro thought that we must to use more severe materials; he brought a couple splinters of the hard wood with which we started our fire, and ignited them.

I did not want to watch anymore, even though the good Christ said we must do it, that it was our duty, to save Theresa. So I left her with the chaplain, who wanted to singe her a little with the splinters. It was not very long before I believed that I heard a moaning and whimpering. I returned and told Don Pedro that he had done enough. Theresa was burned in many places, but it was still impossible to bring her to kiss the picture of the Madonna, and you could still clearly see the stubbornness of the indwelling devil.

Despite that I could not bear the sight of her wounded back and gathered some of the healing herbs, which she had taught me about, and laid them on her with a bandage of soft plant leaves. Theresa said nothing, only kissed me on the hand, so that I began to believe that she had regained her senses and perhaps would not resist our request so strongly the next day.

But we were to see that Theresa was entirely in the power of the devil. Overnight Don Pedro had hung the picture of the Madonna on a newly driven post in our hut, so that the mother of god might spread her mantle upon us and protect us from the evil spirits and terrors that now surrounded us.

When it became light and we arose, we didn't see the picture in its place and found it only after a search among the bushes; entirely broken into splinters and completely destroyed. Theresa's stone knife lay close by and we were not in any doubt that she had destroyed it. When we asked her about it, she didn't deny her deed in anyway; instead she spoke with a strong glow in her eyes, she had now conquered her enemy.

Then a blind rage came over me, because my heart had hung on this portrait, which was our sanctuary and for me at the same time showed the features of my beloved. And it seemed to me, as if Theresa, in destroying the portrait, had also destroyed all our hope of ever returning back to Spain. I could not control myself and beat Theresa with my fists and finally chased her away, telling her that I would kill her if she ever dared to come back to us. Don Pedro had intended that we punish her some more, but I was fed up with the beating and singeing, and only cared about one thing, to not ever see Theresa in front of me again.

She stood silent for a while by our bed and looked over at me, as if she didn't understand what I had just said to her. But as I repeated my command with strong words and waved her away with outstretched arms, she turned and left with a lowered head. I climbed to the heights above the ruins, which were even more fallen down, and watched after her, how she climbed down the cliff of the mountain and then took the path through the wide grassy plain that to my calculations must lead back to the village, so I assumed that she wanted to go back to her countrymen.

And now I must report something strange, which proves perfectly how powerful the devil is inside us and how great our weakness is. Theresa was scarcely out of my sight when a great sadness fell over me that lasted the entire day, even though I kept repeating to myself that we should be happy to have finally gotten rid of this wicked heathen and servant of Satan, and even though Don Pedro had referred to the story of the arid fig trees that needed to be eradicated and thrown into the fire. In the course of the night my sadness became a heavy fear that would not let me sleep and threw me from one side to the other, until Don Pedro finally awoke and asked me what was going on. I was not able to conceal from him that I couldn't sleep because we had lost Theresa. At this Don Pedro responded to me that he was heavily troubled since we had chased the woman away, out of fear that she might betray our camp to her countrymen out of revenge. I knew that Theresa would never do that, but I didn't want to say this to Pedro, because he might perhaps think that I was still too attached to Theresa.

But with every hour—despite all objections, the power of Satan overcame that of Christ in me, so that, on the following evening I was entirely confused and sad in the depths of my soul. I thought only about Theresa's fate and could only imagine the evil and swift punishment that she had received from her own people, whom she had betrayed. I dwelt upon this thought until I could no longer resist, and the image that kept coming to me grew ever more terrible and bloody. Once during the night it seemed that a voice called me by name. I sat up and then at the same moment, very close by, I heard the abominable screeches and cries of birds that were tearing out the hearts of sleeping whales.

Such a terror fell over me that I almost lost my senses. I jumped up and ran, without telling Don Pedro that I was leaving, out of the ruins, down the mountain, across the plain and toward the village. I ran so quickly, that I noticed nothing of it myself, and was sometimes startled at the large leaps that my shadow made in the moonlight next to me.

Around daybreak I came to the forest above the village and then had to go slower between the tree trunks. When I came out of the forest it was

almost sunrise. I found myself on a rocky ledge above the huts, and even these lay so far below that the great light of the morning sky had still not reached them, yet I could see everything perfectly. There on the place in front of the house of the king two great fires were lit, around which a crowd of people were circling.

My hopes were dashed, because it was impossible for me to go unseen into the village and discover where Theresa could be found. While I was still thinking about what I should do, the king stepped out of his hut. The people immediately drew back, so that a circular shape was cleared in which the two fires burned. But between them, tied with rope, lay a human body on the ground and I recognized Theresa.

The king was greeted with a great rattle of drums and clanging of cymbals, and the warriors, placed in a circle, swung their spears and shouted his name. As he arrived at the mat on which the prisoner lay two women with skirts of leaves and red coral necklaces between their breasts approached from the fires.

Three bowls were brought up, baked fish was in the first, in the second some type of food like bread and in the third some cloths and mats made from palm tree fronds. After the bowls were set down in front of the king, the two women came up; each took one of the cloths, spread it on the ground and sat down placing themselves in such a way that their faces were turned to the east, which was already so light that you could expect to see the sun any minute.

One of the women carried a trumpet out of reeds in her hand; the other carried a stone knife. They stood that way for a while, without moving, until the sun lifted its edge over the horizon. Then the woman blew three blasts on her trumpet and began to sing in a loud voice, to which the other answered. This back and forth singing continued until the sun had completely risen. Then the first woman wrapped one of the cloths around her head and slowly began to walk around the body lying on the ground.

The other wrapped a binding around her forehead and followed the first at the same pace. Then they changed places, the first threw away her cloth and took up a binding, while the second wrapped her head completely.

Then they threw away the bindings and the cloths and continued to dance around the prisoner, and then once more exchanged places.

I saw the gleaming naked breasts and the red coral necklaces swinging back and forth between them. This dance lasted for a very long time until the king gave a signal with his hand. Then the first woman came up close to him and received a bowl filled with palm wine. She turned back to dancing, put the shell up to her lips three or four times without drinking, and finally with a swing, poured a little out over Theresa's breast.

At the same moment the second dancer rushed at Theresa and stabbed her stone knife twice into her heart. The clanging and drumming became a great noise; the first woman touched the tip of her trumpet into the flowing blood and sprayed it out over the people, not any differently than our priests do with holy water.

I watched all this in a condition that robbed me of all my will and only my ability to think remained, so that while I reproached myself strongly for my cowardice, at the same time I realized that no help in the world could tear Theresa away from her fate. I don't know what happened in the village after that. I left the place and slowly returned through the forest and over the plain back to our camp. I made no attempt at being careful, because I didn't care if I was discovered or not.

As I reached the ash heap of the golden city, I found Don Pedro in a state of great agitation about me, but I gave him no answer to his question of where I had been. Then a terrible hatred against him filled me completely. The devil whispered to me that he was the one responsible for Theresa's death. I sat down on the ground and when my hand touched the grass, Satan stabbed me with Theresa's stone knife. Then I was compelled to immediately stand back up again. I stepped up to Pedro with the knife in my hand, and without knowing what I was doing, stabbed the knife into his breast twice. In this you can see that the devil was guiding my hand, not my own will.

Pedro collapsed and cried, "Brother, what have you done?" and passed away.

I only came back to my senses after his death, and knew that because of what had happened the Lord and all his saints had abandoned me.

The few empty pages that I have used for this manuscript are coming to an end, and I must hurry to say what is still to be said. I dug a grave for Don Pedro at the foot of the cross, before which we had performed our services and lowered him into it. Then I took his prayer book with me and left the place, which the natives rightfully take as a dwelling place of demons. I headed for the coast, determined to either die or leave the island. During the following night I succeeded in taking a boat, unnoticed, despite the placed guards, and arrived on the high seas.

After many adventures and dangers and after even more hungry days, the wind drove me onto this little island, which according to the speech of the occupants belongs to the Kingdom of Cipango, and where these harmless and friendly people have taken good care of me.

After a short stay I fell into a high fever which left me very weak, which always returns, and I know with full certainty, will bring my death. Yet I don't want to die without first writing down my experiences on the island of Zubu. I have prepared the ink myself, write with a pen of reed, and the heathens of this island see me as a great sorcerer. This manuscript serves not as a report to the world, because it will never come before those eyes, but is instead for myself alone. I have determined, as soon as it is finished, to turn my thoughts to my days on Zubu, and spend the rest of my days in prayer and penance for the salvation of my soul as I await my death.

But if this should ever come into the hands of a Christian, I repeat my plea first expressed at the beginning, and close in the same way as I began: "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, Amen!"

Familiar Moves

After the death of his girlfriend, Bettina, whom Herbert Ostermann, medical student, had lived together with for almost two years; becoming a hermit was the best way to avoid people.

Being at the podium for countless semesters, during the prime of his life, had made him more critical of the academic youths, and Ostermann was already standing alone like a cliff. Then you add the pain of his lost girlfriend to it and he appeared to want nothing to do with his younger comrades. The life of high spirits and indiscretion lay behind and beneath him.

But Ostermann had more friends among the youthful students than he knew. His albeit not affectionate, but always polite manner, the certainty with which he kept little promises, the impression of unconditional reliability which he gave, let him appear as a paragon of all essential male qualities to his comrades.

Finally, they were interested in him, much more than he knew at the time, because of his relationship with the little German-Russian, and her quick, somewhat puzzling death that had caused him to become so closed off.

They knew the couple very well from the assembly hall and the concert hall. They had seen them together countless times and only occasionally alone. The tall, lean man and the petite, quick East Sea German did not seem like an exceptionally well matched couple. His movements, so to say, were awkward and angular as he took the lead while her charming curves did not entirely match as she followed. Yet there was something there despite the outer differences that implied an innermost communion. For that reason no one dared, what otherwise under similar circumstances was so common, attempt to take this most lovely of all students away from her friend and take her for themselves.

Ostermann accompanied the eager to learn and enthusiastic student to her science lectures, which lay far beneath his own studies, and listened patiently once more to the beginning basics of anatomy. It appeared as if he was starting over with his girlfriend and would finally bring a prosperous conclusion to his very lengthy studies. They became accustomed seeing the togetherness of this couple as something solid and inviolable; sensed something holy flowing out from the bond and observed the relationship with piquant curiosity. The death of Bettina horrified them all; even those medical students with a hardened disposition that cultivated cynicism as a critical virtue, could not escape this collapse.

So it was just an outpouring of the common compassion and respect for Ostermann, that made one of the younger students of those collectively assembled, the student Richard Kretschmer, ask him to come back. At first Ostermann declined the well-intended invitation. But then, as he passed through the urging voices, he was asked to at least take it into consideration. And finally he agreed, perhaps feeling that he didn't want to be alone any longer.

Ostermann left his previous dwelling, one in the country over grown with wild vines, in whose spired upper story he had lived for almost two years with Bettina, and moved in with the rest of his countrymen. From out of a quiet, poetic corner he moved into a bare student's room in the large city. He didn't allow himself to notice that something was missing in his life, but he didn't take part in the lives of his comrades either.

These well-intended people wanted Ostermann to escape from his unfruitful and dangerous brooding and were always urging him to go along to student festivities and get-togethers.

Fasching time came, the first festival since the death of Bettina, and the heads of the university planned an evening of festivities to celebrate the formation of their new committee and this happy time. A student drinking party was to take place, with all kinds of strange fellows and performances according to the mood of the festival. His friend was seriously resolved to entice Ostermann out of his cave for this very special festival.

“It is wrong for me to celebrate,” said Ostermann, as Kretschmer urged him even more strongly.

“You won’t be doing anything wrong,” replied his friend forcefully. “The dead are dead, and no mourning can change it.”

Ostermann looked at the younger and rasher person seriously and it seemed as if he were about to reply. But he remained silent, and when Kretschmer wouldn’t stop assailing him, he finally agreed to take part in the festival. Even though Ostermann couldn’t shake the feeling that something about it was wrong, the good will of his comrade was so apparent and sincere, that he didn’t want to lose his friend over it.

The large hall of the restaurant, where the Fasching evening took place, was full of young medical students. The faculty, feeling resplendent in the formation of their new committee, stepped proudly to the front. A large number of professors were in attendance and watched the goings on with fatherly benevolence.

The seemingly spotless table cloths spread over the long tables streamed the aroma of being freshly washed. The arc lamp under the ceiling sent a corona of glowing, needle pointed rays through the hall. From the kitchen came the clatter of dishes and often the aroma of prepared food.

One table was set up as a popular raffle of harmless jokes articles and things medical students would like as decorations for their writing desks: blinding white bone specimens as paperweights, half skulls, and a shoulder blade on a base with a collar bone railing to be used as a large ashtray.

The young people, an entire crowd of college students, went back and forth, assembled together into groups and then once more separated.

Ostermann, who had not been among such a large group of people for a long time, was not able to enjoy the uninhibited festivities.

While Kretschmer, next to him, was making an effort to involve him in the net of shouts and drinking taking place back and forth over the entire table, Ostermann fell ever more deeply into a feeling of discomfort. The

noise, the needle sharp lighting of the arc lamp, the back and forth movement of the crowd, seemed partly exaggerated, foolish and crude, partly overstated and harsh to him. He began to regret that he had come here with his friend.

In the meantime the gathering took its accustomed form, speeches and songs followed one another, the professors jovially spoke of their delight at the antics of the academic youths . . . “Sour week, happy festival” . . . and sometimes the young girls laughed loudly with joking phrases. When Ostermann heard this laughter or saw the waving of a brightly colored dress, it tore at his heart, and flowed through his body like a stream of sharp pointed ice crystals.

Finally around eleven o’clock, he believed that he had done enough and told Kretschmer of his decision to go.

“Don’t talk,” laughed the other, “the best part is just starting. The door is guarded! No one is allowed to leave!”

And indeed one of the gentlemen of the new committee shortly announced a break so that a humorous Fasching performance could be prepared. In the sign of the carnival prince, much was allowed, honny soit, qui maly pense und so. [evil unto him who thinks evil of it]

After a somewhat commemorative speech filled with beer and brimstone, curtains were pulled across the wide hall in the space opposite the professors. A stage was set up behind it and you could see a vivisection table, on which a corpse lay, clothed only with a loin cloth.

A scene played out between the anatomy professor and several hung-over students that had returned from a card game after skipping work. The main joke of the performance lay in the successful depiction of one of the most well-known and popular professors, who came onto the stage with all his peculiarities, wheezing and spitting. That awoke the unbounded hilarity of the entire crowd, and most of all, the one that had been portrayed himself, who now saw himself in the distorted mirror image across from him. Next to the satire of the professor they had also thought to pattern the play after the anatomy of Rembrandt. The closing scene showed the

professor in the position of Doctor Tulp standing at the corpse, surrounded by his students. Only he was not referring to bundles of nerves and muscles, but instead revealing all kinds of things that emerged from out of the depths of the corpse. It was all common stuff, a beer coaster, a cigarette lighter, a house key and a committee song book. But when he turned the corpse over and began to work on its backside, the corpse jumped up from the vivisection table with an angry bellow and the performance ended with a wild flight.

The grotesque humor, that was intended to put all the guests in a good mood, was not entirely missed by Ostermann. But in the end, it led to the uncomfortable feeling that such playing with the horror of death itself did not seem entirely appropriate for these unrestrained youth.

Ostermann also thought that perhaps it was only his own emotions that caused this heavy feeling of guilt. At the same time he felt so strangely held there that he no longer had any thought of leaving.

After a while a young medical student stepped out in front of the violet curtain, a book in his hand, from which he began to recite a poem with little talent and much enthusiasm. It was Goethe's "Toten-tanz". [Dance of the Dead]

"The watchman, that looks in the middle of the night down on the graves in their places . . ."

Ostermann found this tedious recitation seemingly superficial, but with the final words the hall suddenly became dark and then it was seen what purpose the poem had served.

The opened stage now showed a cemetery. From out of the darkest darkness something white stirred and moved forward. You could make out a figure wrapped in a sheet and groping its way between the tombstones. The specter lounged against one of the graves, set a violin against a bony chin and began to play in an absurd way.

Then it struck midnight somewhere, as if from a church tower. The little orchestra in front of the stage took up the haunting melody of the violin and wove it into highly strange, eerie music, whose bizarre

harmonies and choppy rhythms seemed to conjure all kinds of terrors from out of the darkness. And then came, entirely in the manner of Goethe's poem, from the left and the right, limping, groping, and stomping grave occupants, climbing out of self-opening mounds, moving from behind the tombstones to the front and staggering between the clods in the darkness. Around their limbs waved and flapped long grave cloths, in front of their faces they had white, phosphorescent masks of fleshless skulls with dark eyes, nostril holes and the grin of bare teeth.

They moved to the beat of the horrible music, approaching one another with contortions and ridiculous curtseys, in a mocking of the ordinary form of the dance. It was as if you could hear the rattling of the bones, the clicking of the thin joints under the white sheets, like the clicking of castanets, castanets of the grave, which formed a hard necked accompaniment to the music.

It was clear that the author and director of this production, some student, was an entirely original head of many fantasies.

Then knots of swirling, flitting movements formed on the dark stage as specters joined with each other, showing that the distinction between the sexes still existed within the realm of the dead. Now that eyes had become accustomed to the darkness you could see how men and women stepped out in pairs and then began a circular dance of phantoms winding around between the tombstones.

Even though all the onlookers knew that their own colleagues had discussed, put together and practiced this, and even if they thought they recognized someone beneath the ghostly wrappings, they were still transported into a very strange mood, an unprecedented excitement of the nerves.

Some trick of the beer caused a wild tension to come over the students, which you could sense as frivolous, without being able to tell its origin. This mixture of gruesome and grotesque was repulsive and compelling, fearful and as spellbinding as a look into an abyss. These young people, whose youth and profession brought daily encounters with death and to whom death was unavoidable, felt this dance of the dead, this play of

putrefaction, was somehow a challenge; and somewhere in the back of their minds the will to live, to light and to health set itself against the dark influence of this scene.

Meanwhile the dance on the stage progressed, the couples uniting and separating, linking into a chain, forming themselves into a ball that quickly circled around itself, while a whitish-blue light, the phosphorous glow of decay, radiated out at them from the stage and the phantoms appeared to dance faster.

The performance sought to be loyal to Goethe's poem, and there was something sharply familiar in the movements, some evil intention, something puppet like and angular, as if they really were fleshless limbs dancing.

At the beginning of this performance Herbert Ostermann felt a dull, hollow feeling arising, as if streaming from a storehouse into his body under great pressure, a kind of rage that incited him to jump up and do something foolish to stop the increasing tension. It shot through his head to beat on the table, smash a beer glass on the floor or simply scream with a wide open mouth, "Stop!"

But lightning quick, even as he considered these possibilities; he already felt how the angry outrage left his body, poured out and faded away, leaving him limp and powerless, exhausted and empty, exposed and defenseless against some unformed terror. And then it came to him, slinking from out of the void like a slimy, heavy fluid, rising up to the wall of his "I", to the foundation of his world, a terror and fear of these wrapped things. A distant part of his consciousness was extinguished in this flood, went under, while another self rose up from it like an island, foul and glowing with an unnatural light.

He sat there, one hand cramped around a beer glass, the other on his knee, balled into a fist, with a distended face, from which his eyeballs appeared swollen from out of their place. That which was dancing around on the stage was an abscess of decay, clotted blood of the grave, stained with the slime of death. Didn't anyone but him feel these dark, singeing rays that went out from this dance, an invisible, malignant radiation from

some metal or stone perhaps; a corrosive excretion from the dance that ate through flesh and bone until it entered into the very soul? Couldn't anyone sense how the poisonous pyorrhea ulcer raced around to seize and destroy the entire person?

While the horror sucked Herbert in, it suddenly seemed to him as if there was something familiar in the movements of the dancers. It was like when you see something vaguely familiar, yet distorted, and all efforts at remembering are in vain and fail to take form. Within the swaying, twisting, at times advancing and then retreating movements of the dance of phantoms, a flitting shadow of memory jumped forward, disappeared, lost itself in the chaos, and then reappeared once more. After a long stupor Herbert began to breathe heavier, as he recognized fragments of some movement on an innermost level, an inclination, a step, the lift of a hand. Then this shadow of memory lifted, and let itself down upon one of the figures, on one of the female phantoms, upon which it came and went.

It was a tentative growing of form from out of the chaos, a hesitant crawling forth from out of the darkness, of which Herbert felt, besides fear, also something like an outburst of passionate tenderness, a deep sympathy with it.

He was in a complete bundle of unsolved threads from a vague piece of his past that wound around him and held him fast. The phantom on the stage above whirled even more crazily between the gravestones; the skull remained motionless in scary contrast to the leaping and fluttering wrappings. The bones rattled against each other even more loudly, an entire confusion of dry and hard sounds droned from the stage out into the hall. It seemed that the lust of the phantoms had not died within the graves and a horrible orgy of skeletons was about to begin.

Then as if from a great height the sound of a clock fell in the middle of the dance. It was as if the phantoms were blown apart from each other by an explosion. The dance was destroyed. The figures stumbled and staggered back and forth, groping among the tombstones, robbed of all certainty; fearfully searching for missing parts, which they once more put back together. Wrapped with sheets, floundering, timid, staggering and flapping,

once more robbed of their freedom, they crouched down at their tombstones and disappeared into the darkness.

There was a large exhalation through the hall before the first timid applause began. Then gradually the clapping of many hands, as if this happy noise could tear away the thin, horrible web that seemed to hang from the stage over the tables.

The president banged with his gavel and bellowed a command.

“By the devil, that was beautiful!” exclaimed Kretschmer and took a large gulp of his stale beer. Then he stood up, pulled on his waistband, flexed and straightened up again, as if he wanted to see whether his flesh and blood were still held together in their accustomed way.

Herbert Ostermann didn't reply. He was busy trying to find his way out of the shock. There was a strange taste in his mouth and a peculiar emotion remained; a bitterness that could be described as heartburn of the spirit. He turned and saw the participants of the dance of death coming down the small steps of the stage and into the hall. They still wore their grave clothes, but had taken off their masks and fresh, red, youthful faces showed from out of the wrapping of the grave. That was the safest way to dispel the intensity of the past half hour and regain the old composure. They were surrounded, questioned, and praised, as people went around like tightrope dancers joking about an abyss they had just crossed over.

As Ostermann turned back to the table, he was struck by something ice cold and burning through the middle of his heart.

Next to him, in the place that Richard Kretschmer had just left, sat one of the dancers, very quietly, with white cotton gloves over hands respectfully folded in her lap. She still wore the grave clothes like the others, but had not taken off the skull mask, and when she turned her head to her neighbor, there were glimmers in her eyes like distant sparks in dark caves.

It seemed as if she expected to be addressed, and after several tries Herbert succeeded in forcing a type of obligatory smile on his lips and asked if the Fräulein was satisfied with the success of the performance.

The dancer, who seemed to not want to speak, simply nodded.

“Even on the stage you must have noticed the immense tension of the audience, when the dance, which at first showed recognizable amateur shortcomings, became freer, more skillful and artistic until something happened and a living transformation took place between the stage and the audience.”

Herbert continued to speak, as if continuous questions were directed at him by the soft glowing gaze. He spoke of things he hadn't thought about for a long time. He attempted to bring rationality to the mood into which he had sunken, and felt the power of his speech was like the board on which a lost swimmer placed his last hope.

“Yes, it is strange,” his neighbor said, “for the living to perform a play about the dead.”

“And the cemetery music,” continued Herbert in great agitation. “That modern music with its remarkable beat and intricate rhythms somehow causes the listener to sense all the horrors of the grave. It is illogical music; the logic of music is in its melody. Mozart for example, was a logician and therefore takes us right where his spirit desires with the convoluted scene in ‘Don Juan’, not to the heart . . . but this modern illogical music goes beyond death, which itself is illogical . . .”

“And you are a medical student?” his neighbor asked.

Her voice was muffled and unclear as if pressed through some unclean medium, yet even in its distortion an original melodiousness was unmistakable and Herbert regretted that the resonance had become so altered and broken through the mask. This thought brought his attention with complete sharpness to this thing of paper maché, which was supposed to portray death in a Fasching's joke. He had to admit that the mask had not been created from cheap materials. In its own way the mask was completely artistic. The harmless material, from out of which the face of the ugly step-mother was portrayed; a dull country clod, a wanton slut, double chinned with bloated cheeks, a red nose and every protuberance and rankness of the flesh; had this time been used to form deceptively smooth bones.

Everything was exact according to color and structure, each bone anatomically correct and sewn so that one could believe that the head really was a skull. They had kept a real skull as a model and used it to make an exact copy with such attention to detail that yes, in many places, in the eyes, the nasal holes and between the teeth the remnants of rotting flesh was portrayed. But the scariest thing was that hair hung down from the back part of the skull, down to the neck, and you couldn't really tell how it was attached to the bone. That was in contrast to how the face was rendered, where the hair covering was no longer present and the skull was smooth. If the image of the mask was intended to heighten the horror as much as possible, it succeeded through this hair, discolored, matted and covered with little clumps of dirt. It looked as if it really had come from out of the grave.

Herbert Ostermann observed all this with unfathomable calmness, sharp and clear, as if glimpsing a great danger, something that strained against the immense power center of man, against the "I" itself.

"And you are a medical student?" his neighbor repeated her question in the meantime.

"What do you mean? Really! Do you know me?"

"I know you!"

"Won't you take off your mask? The play has ended! The other ladies already have."

Something like a soft rattling came out from between the teeth, that was supposed to be a laugh, but at the same time Herbert remembered in a tortured way a sound from out of his childhood days. It was when Prusik, the merchant, threw large, strangely formed scraps of dried shell fish onto the counter. At the same time he was reminded of something else, the forced laugh that seemed to have come from out of completely dried out, mummified, black vocal chords, rustled like a grave wreath.

The dancer stopped laughing.

"The other ladies find that the masks do not suit them. I am not vain. Mine fits me quite well. And you must still puzzle out who I am."

“I know you then?”

She turned to Herbert and slid a little closer: “Yes!”

Again there was an ice cold and burning pain through the middle of his heart.

Then a miniscule movement, the irrelevant shrugging of the shoulders once more threw an uneasy memory over Herbert, a fragment of a gesture that he recognized. One that had spoken out to him in the play of limbs during that complex dance, one that had come from this dancer that sat next to him.

Immediately the blind towering fear was once more there, breaking the possessed calm of sharp observation, rushing with him down into the darkness. He looked around. To the left and right colleagues were talking away over their beer glasses, writing on calling cards, toasting one another. No one was paying attention to them. It was as if Herbert and his neighbor were not present.

Despite this everything had become unbearable to him. The noise and light beat oppressively against him. He suddenly stood up.

“Come,” we will go somewhere else.”

She was immediately in agreement and followed him to the wardrobe, where she stood next to him for a moment in her coat, and then they went out onto the street covered with a thin, miserable covering of big city snow.

Down below was an urban canyon, above, a few stars shone exactly between the thin, taut wires of the telephone lines. They looked like little glowing musical notes caught between the systems of lines and gave off an infinitely harsh and bitter melody at the desecration of heavenly lights being caught in the mundane.

Herbert took off his hat and the cold pressed against his head, tightening the skin of his face and neck. The dancer walked beside him, looking strange in her white sheets, on which her coat hung like a pair of

black wings. Carts came rumbling by at a trot, automobiles leaped around corners with a squeal or a sudden honk, throwing harsh balls of light against the walls of houses, or they saw them coming from further away, two little balls of light at the end of the street, that quickly came rolling up in a dark roaring tunnel, then very close, a broad streak of light sweeping over the pavement. They stood in a blinding tremor of light, and then it was gone and the cold darkness pressed back in.

Meanwhile a couple beats of dance music spewed out through some quickly opened hotel door, fragments of laughter ran into the night, Fasching spread little waves of happiness along the lonely path of Herbert and his companion. But all that seemed immaterial to Herbert compared to the terrible feeling that was inside of him, that flowed out of him like a heavy, thick, freezing smoke.

They entered a little coffee house, in which Herbert often liked to sit for a half hour behind a newspaper, more from a sense of duty than from a sense of need. Yet on the threshold it occurred to him that now his companion must take her mask completely off. But she said the same thing as before, she wanted to remain unrecognized for a while longer, and since all the locals were celebrating carnival time they would allow her the freedom to continue wearing her mask.

She appeared to be correct, since among the tumult of the tables quite a number of people were masquerading, in national costumes, Venezuelans, Spaniards, Turks, as well as mountain folk, Eskimos and Indians. Among all these worn-out and faded traditional costumes and masks a phantom seemed to pass just as well, so Herbert's companion was not noticed. She pushed through the thickest group without anyone taking special notice or making any effort to move away and again there was the unmistakable recognition of posture and movement that now hit Herbert like a bodily pain.

As they sat down at a table that had just become free, he seized her roughly by the arm.

“Who are you?”

He searched for her gaze, but found only a vague glimmer in the depths of her mask.

The waiter stood before Herbert. He let go of the hard, thin arm that had not given beneath his grip, and ordered coffee. After a silence, in which he observed the clownish, lusty celebration around them, the waiter returned bringing a single cup of coffee and placed it in front of Herbert. As the young man left and seemed indifferent to what his neighbor wanted, she asked him to let it be. This was their hour and he was not to ruin it for anything.

These few words, which again seemed so puzzlingly familiar, stirred such an unspeakable sadness in Herbert, that he put his head in his hands. He placed his fingers on his forehead and thumbs over his ears, as if he wanted to spare his senses from the craziness of the outer world.

It occurred to him that earlier his neighbor had asked, with ironic intent, if he was a medical student. Why that, he thought. Is that how she knew him? . . .

Between his spread fingers he looked angrily and resentfully into her eye holes. He understood, concluded, that she had something she wanted to say to him. Something that he, as a medical student should have already learned, how to become reconciled with death—that was the common view of the good people and of the bad cartoons, that the doctor and death stood in a type of company, one the lackey of the other.

And death always stood as a condition of his own occupation, as an element of the divine world. Just like the fur trader believed the fur bearing animals grew for him; and the mine owner, that the ancient forests of the Stone Age had flourished for his own pocket; and the architect, that gravity was discovered for him alone. In this way doctors maintained the logic of death, because it was demanded by the logic of their profession.

But this was not his viewpoint.

He always found that death was something absolutely senseless; that death itself lived the life of a fat good for nothing, a sewer man, a wanton lost spirit that would in the end set a goal that was only cheap and tawdry.

It was an opinion grubber, a fist baller, begrudging not only everything earned, but also everything glowing, tender, and contributing to love and happiness. All this had to be mowed down; this was proof of the senselessness of death.

No, his treasured values were unknown and in no way popular sentiments, but instead straight up truth. That this world was highly rich in misery was not to be doubted. But why? Every day you could see how the competent and honorable were driven without reason to the bottle, how the evil climbed up and the good were left sitting down in the mud and finally how death thoughtlessly brought forth a settlement, in which all of this and everything else on the mixed table of life was wiped away.

But how different it would be around the world, how bright and lusty it would be if a letter of parole for real human worth was presented to death. Those who according to their nature could not reach after a higher "I" would be weeded out; but those able to purify and reform themselves, their lives would be lengthened in the measure of their goodness and throughout the greatness of eternity. Then perhaps you could still speak with Dante, Michelangelo and Albrecht Dürer. Then for the first time life would be entirely beneficial, a mutual exchange of love and effort, a mutual exchange of help. .

The little flames in the depths of the eye holes of his neighbor appeared to grow brighter, a thin, but sturdy layer of air, like glass, enclosed Herbert and his neighbor, and except for this sphere you could only see colored, unrelated scraps of the surrounding world . . .

And already there were several things he could talk to death about, because he had seen him up close and the illogic of death had been clearly proven. If the world was arranged according to some reasonable plan, then Bettina would still be alive and he would not be so lonesome, so broken hearted, poison blooded, brain destroyed lonesome. He was a Robinson in the middle of the trackless ocean of life, the prisoner of an ice palace with all the terrors of both poles.

Bettina? Well, this unknown person admitted to knowing him, so she must have also known Bettina. Her blood didn't freeze at the name, as if

she knew the meaning there was within this name. She, who now belonged to eternity, should have lived for thousands of years, if there was any justice in this world. Oh, he knew death well enough, the old arch-roguer and pathetic buffoon; he had a grip on him. The fellow approached, made himself unrecognizable, but betrayed himself like a bad comedian without a punch line, forgetting his lines, disgracing his co-performers, taking them prisoner and making them into murderers.

Yes, murderers, he must be aware of it. When one of his beloved kills, you cannot call it anything else, right? Over there a child grows in its mother's love, but within him also grows a fear of the world; a child who doesn't want nature to take its due. Already, all around, people are stretching out their long naked necks, crooked noses and vulture claws, already pointing their round fingers, gleaming with fat, thrusting in shame. It is an arsenal of flesh pistols, fists filled with bottles and the pointer finger as the muzzle pointed in shame. And someone silently blurts out: "Give us today our daily bread!" . . . There is only enough for two, not enough for three.

But colleague, the germinating life must not be uprooted and destroyed! There is a path; it is dark to travel before the light is visible. And when the damned stand upon it; just once, there are only crimes against that which exists, but none against the unborn. Yes, but death crouches there somewhere in the corner. The miserable scoundrel squints, reaches for the little medicine bottle, shakes it and sticks its venom and poison on everything with an invisible slime.

That's when you see your beloved convulsed in cramps, fighting back and clawing with all the power in life and yet you see the life slip out of your grip and become a flood, slowly running out to a dark door, through which it disappears. There you stand on the beach with all the skill of a soon-to-be doctor, and when the last drop has gurgled into the channel of death and disappeared; then a large, red hot needle presses through the top of your head and out through your entire body as a solidly forged, merciless word—murderer.

And the regret . . . the step by step searches into the past, and there is no day that is any different, no hour that does not fail to reveal . . .

Herbert Ostermann felt himself slowly come together, there was a hot forehead between his spread out fingers and two heavy lumps of feet beneath the table, and all this was bound together above and below with a broad band of pain. He could not say whether he had thought all this to himself, or if he had said it out loud, but he felt an understanding from his neighbor, as if from himself.

The waiter had noticed the lonely guest a long time ago. He considered the young man who was sitting alone in his corner, his distraught glances and heavy hand movements as he mumbled to himself, to be a heavy drunk in a miserable condition. Then, after the small room had emptied and the first street car rumbled by outside, he stepped up to his last guest and let the coins in his trouser pocket jingle.

Herbert looked up and saw the strange man, black and white in a radiant opalescent wreath of steamy light. There was a sharp impression of empty glasses, burned up matches and gray ash heaps, and in the middle a pasty smile . . .

“We will go,” he murmured.

The dancer walked in front of him. But it was not strange anymore, everything was familiar and deep, embedded deep in his life. Originating from out of his core, it was still without a name, but was all most there.

“Who are you? Who are you?” and Herbert grabbed at the clothing of his companion. The cloth blew through his hand and in the depths of the eye holes he saw a crackling blue light, like a small discharge of static electricity. And then a churning and trembling ran through his arm, as if he had been struck by a slight blow.

“Where? Where are we going?” he asked stammering.

“I’m going with you!”

Herbert didn’t find it at all odd that this strange girl made this proposal. Everything that had happened, yes, had already happened a hundred times before, every word and every step. He even knew the sound of her voice, and had somehow known that she would come along.

How could he have told all that to a stranger, what he had pulled from out of his innermost core? Only one person had the right to hear all that. This admission hung upon her and transformed the unknown into the known, radiated back from her as a wistful, deep light.

So they walked together through a winter morning still heavy with the dense haze of dreams that were slumbering away, and now and then the first hard beat of work slipped in as well; meanwhile the hoarse remnants of Fasching's revelry still sounded.

As if in a vision Herbert saw a collapsed clown on the brightly lit platform of a streetcar, with half-closed eyes and an extinguished cigar in the corner of a broad mouth. His right arm hung down over the guardrail and from out of his fingers ran a cord, on which a brown teddy bear hopped behind the streetcar in grotesque leaps, thrown from side to side by the rattling of the street car and dragging all its limbs against the pavement.

That was the last thing Herbert saw perfectly. From then on he went in a fog, from out of which just once in a while someone, a person came rushing up in a hurry, only to just as quickly disappear again.

He felt more than he saw, that his companion was not heading into the inner city, but instead headed out into the suburbs.

“Not that way . . . I live in the city,” he said.

“I don't know anywhere else.”

She was right, and Herbert went along with her, walking next to the dancer down cool, endless streets and dark streetcars kept appearing in front of them.

He thought that what was happening was remarkable, even if she didn't think so. Part of him was in the future and at the same time in the past, as well as being timeless. Perhaps death was not the end of time, but the uplifting of all disappointments. But then it would be the solution and it might be possible, through a strong will and perhaps through the power of a remorseful man to bring someone back; it could never give the complete appearance of someone, but it would be enough to serve! In this manner all

questions would be answered, if only he knew her name. If only he could think of it . . .

A familiar house door was there, with withered vine boughs around the bottom story and the arch; the knocker with the lion's head, over whose menacing snout they had always laughed. They went up and the stairs curved in front of them in the darkness, into which the morning fog now pressed . . . the seventeenth step still creaked as always, and you still had to tip toe past the door of the landlord. The narrow stairs turned tighter and tighter in the tower, and there was the branch of a cherry tree in front of the little window, from which you once tore a bouquet of flowers in the spring. There was the little black figurine of the Virgin that was set into the wall with its little red glass light.

And then the door to the tower room sprang open and you were home . . . once more Herbert saw everything perfectly, all the beloved furniture, the writing desk and the bookcase, and behind green curtains both beds, from which she had just risen up.

And when he turned around, Bettina stood there, in a white flowing gown and her parted hair, which she had just combed, hung down on both sides of her head.

She looked up and Herbert saw a blue shimmer in the depths of her eyes. But her flesh was strangely transformed, it pulled itself like a thin sheet of jelly over the smooth bones of her dance mask, and you could see every indentation and every fissure of her skull. Her hair fell loose and enticing in soft, flowing masses.

And everywhere the transparent features of the bones were eaten away by dull spots, little clumps of earth clung in the corners of the eyes and mouth, and her hair seemed to move slightly by itself as if swarming life lie hidden beneath it.

But Bettina threw the hair out of her face, lifted her arms high over her head and with strong, thrusting, exaggerated, and victorious movements began the wanton, angular, and provocative dance of the phantoms . . .

