

# Fire On The Glacier



**Fire**  
**On The**  
**Glacier**

By  
Paul Busson

**Fire on the Glacier**

Originally published in 1923 in the German Language

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## **Contents**

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[SECTION ONE](#)

[SECTION TWO](#)

[SECTION THREE](#)

[SECTION FOUR](#)

[SECTION FIVE](#)

[SECTION SIX](#)

[SECTION SEVEN](#)

[SECTION EIGHT](#)

[SECTION NINE](#)

[SECTION TEN](#)

[SECTION ELEVEN](#)

[SECTION TWELVE](#)

[SECTION THIRTEEN](#)

[SECTION FOURTEEN](#)

[SECTION FIFTEEN](#)

[SECTION SIXTEEN](#)

[SECTION SEVENTEEN](#)

[SECTION EIGHTEEN](#)

[SECTION NINETEEN](#)

[SECTION TWENTY](#)

[SECTION TWENTY-ONE](#)

[SECTION TWENTY-TWO](#)

[SECTION TWENTY-THREE](#)

[SECTION TWENTY-FOUR](#)

[SECTION TWENTY-FIVE](#)

[SECTION TWENTY-SIX](#)

[About Joe Bandel](#)

## INTRODUCTION

So why did I decide to do a new translation of “Fire on the Glacier” more commonly known as “The Fire Spirits” by Paul Busson? We know Dancing Tuatara Press recently came out with the old existing translation and I think Black Mask Press came out with a copy as well even before that? I know that many years ago before either of those editions came out I managed to find an electronic copy in PDF at some European University Library and read it then and I loved it!

Back then I was struggling to translate Hanns Heinz Ewers and couldn't even dare dream of translating something by Paul Busson who most people have never heard of. This book is now the sixteenth book that I have translated not counting magazines like *Der Orchideengarten* and *Kokain*. I dare say that things have gotten a little easier.

The truth is that I always knew I would someday translate this story because I felt it deep down in my soul. It resonated that powerfully! I also knew from personal experience with other books that many if not most existing translations of German stories during that time period (1890s-1930s) were of very poor quality and often censored. I especially found that to be true with existing translations of Hanns Heinz Ewers. And even more astonishing, the Publishing Houses got away with it!

Now for my dirty little secret. I translate out of love and my choices of what to translate take the form of a spiritual quest for me. I don't really care about selling copies or making money. I care about absorbing and integrating the essence or soul of each book that I translate and it is a very intimate process! The words become real, the emotions become real and the fantasy becomes real! When I translate I receive a type of intoxication from the process that I can't find anywhere else in the world and I love it!

For me, “Fire on the Glacier” is almost the “perfect” book having all the elements that I love. It was truly an experience and even when translating I would find myself eagerly turning the pages to find out what

happens next and sharing it with you, the reader in my own words. As you will soon find out on your own this story is exquisite in so many ways.

This story kind of brands itself as a non-supernatural horror story, but not really! Like most good ghost stories the reader is free to accept or reject the supernatural element within the story and that is part of its charm. For me personally the occult or mystical element of this story revolves around the concept of “possession” of living people by the souls of people long dead.

Here is where I will actively differ from most people who will read this book simply for pleasure. In my personal life I have encountered several cases of “possession” of vulnerable people by the “spirits” of those recently passed over. This includes my wife being possessed by the spirit of her mother as her mother lay on her deathbed; the death of my father-in-law when his frightened spirit tried to take over my own body; and several other cases of possession where I ended up needing to help the departed spirit to the light on the other side. Each extremely unpleasant in its own way.

Needless to say, “Fire on the Glacier” scratches that itch for me, and lends the story itself that much more validity!

Joe Bandel





*Late sounds what early sounded,  
Happiness and misfortune become songs,  
(Old saying)*

## SECTION ONE

**H**owling, the foehn wind came down Brennerstrasse, whirling up the white lime dust from the Premonstratensian monastery to the bay window with the gilded roof tiles and twice forced Peter Storck to run after his rough-brushed castor hat to the delight of the street boys. The north wall stretched up, immense, breath-taking, with dark green forests, steep alpine meadows and gray rock. The waters of the Inn River gurgled and roared past Jochen Bridge.

Surly people looked at the young man, who in his cantilevered liver-colored coat and yellow lined top boots, with his blinding white neckerchief and fashionably curved top hat offered an unusual sight. It was market under the open arches of the foliage, but there was little being moved. The butter merchants from the Dux valley, the cheese sellers, millers, butchers and pork butchers had prepared themselves for these expensive times and demanded a lot. And little money was in the country. People like this stranger had to come and drive up the prices!

Peter Storck did not see the ill-tempered looks that flew after him, nor did he understand much of what was being said behind him. He was tired from standing and waiting for so long in the Bavarian General Commissioners Office, which had its place in the ocher-yellow building of the former Imperial Palace. But now the stamped and signed papers bulged his jacket pocket.

For a while, he stood in front of the small semicircular display window of a drug store, looking at silver shellac sticks, brown glue boards, jars of indigo, madder red, chip green, yellow, and dragon's blood, inhaling the peculiar fragrances of all sorts of spices that emanated from the store with the ridiculously stuffed crocodile.

There were all sorts of things to see in the nearby stalls too: domestic hoods made of precious beaver, women's hats with heavy gold embroidery on the flat brim, silver-studded burl pipes, buckskin purses, belts sewn with porcupine quills, shiny gold images of saints on a lace background.

Two Bavarian soldiers, good-natured and coarse, marveled beside him at a painted copperplate engraving depicting the "Highly Feudal Marriage" of Emperor Charles the Sixth in a snail-like winding procession of magnificent carriages, horsemen, and pedestrians.

Peter Storck reached the river again, walked for a while beside its roaring waters, and finally sat down on a pile of boards. It seemed strange to him that he was suddenly sitting there in the pale March sun, watching a four-horse freight wagon carrying wine to the upper country. The brass ornaments on the harnesses jingled, badger fur and red decorative cloth fluttered in the wind. The Wagoner in the blue jacket cracked his whip. - Then Peter pulled his tobacco pipe from his pocket and looked at the apple-green and peach-red tassels, the colors of the Würzburg Franconians, whose union he had joined two years ago as the son of a compatriot. Back in Vienna, he had been interrogated for an entire morning at the police station because of these colorful pipe tassels, and the commissioner had advised him not to wear such student insignia for show. Prince Metternich would not tolerate such things in any way....

But what had happened to his uncle? Again he pulled out the letter from the Bavarian bailiff in Landeck, according to which his uncle Martin Storck in Sankt Marein in the Upper Inn Valley, owner of the Zeitlanghof, had suddenly disappeared, leaving behind nothing but a note which he had written in his own hand. A note in which he himself stated that the farm, with all its furnishings and grounds, would be given to his nephew Peter Storck, who lived in Vienna in his own house "zum Alten Blumenstöckel". Since up to now nothing could be found out about the fate of the missing person, the afore said Peter Storck was to take the house into his care for the time being, otherwise it would have to be sealed by the authorities, whereby no payment whatsoever could be made for losses and damages. Although, according to the opinion of the local inhabitants, Herr Martin Storck had had an accident on a mountain hike, for which, however, there was no evidence whatsoever, it was nevertheless necessary to take care of the house until it was known whether the owner would return.

The lengthy document from Landeck also contained a list of the property and in particular the furnishings that were found in the house, as it had been written by the commission after the disappearance of his uncle.

The countless errands in Vienna and now in Innsbruck had been taken care of, the passport was in order, and nothing stood in the way of the rest of the journey. Peter could finally visit his uncle Martin, who had played such an important role in the dreams of his youth. But his uncle was no longer there.

He had often been spoken of in the family. In front of the growing boy this had always been done with a strange caution. One had often, underestimating the childlike powers of observation, upon Peter's entrance, directed the conversation conspicuously and clumsily to something else.

Eye blinks admonished to be cautious. Peter only knew that this uncle, a brother of his father, had migrated to Vienna from Franconia, had suddenly fled to the wastelands of the Tyrolean high mountains and would never return. Questions on his part were dismissed with reprimands. So it happened that it was not until his seventeenth year that he received more detailed information about the enigmatic hermit, admittedly under accompanying circumstances that meant a profoundly upsetting experience and brought him in a peculiar way, difficult to explain, into a completely changed relationship with his hitherto extremely tender and loving mother.

This happened on the day when one of his mother's cousins, the newly widowed Frau Genoveva Schnäbele from Augsburg, arrived from Passau on a ship to spend some time with her in Vienna to forget her grief. The beautiful and evenly built, still young Frau, a black-haired Swabian with golden shimmering pale skin, appeared to the young man, seized by the first shivers of desire, as a goddess of unearthly glory. In her cheerful health and slender fullness she might seem more than desirable even to spoiled and experienced men. At the first dinner, Peter hardly dared to raise his eyes to the mischievous and lively chattering woman. The jovial father, obviously pleased with the visit, encouraged him to perform all sorts of knightly services. So Peter finally had to lead the stranger to her room with the large silver double candelabra, when she wished to move into her bed chamber.

When he wanted to excuse himself nicely with a deep bow and shyly wished her a good night, the beautiful aunt yawned behind her gracefully held out hand and said, "Since I boarded the flat boat in Passau, I have not yet had a good night's sleep. Now it would be good for me if you, as my cavalier, would pull the shoes off my feet!

Immediately Peter, intoxicated by such sweet service, fell on his knees, and with clumsy and eager haste untied the ribbons from the fine ankles and took off her shoes, but in a fierce rapture held the dainty warm little foot with the wantonly moving little toes in his hand, while his eyes filled with tears for some unknown reason. His aunt noticed this, laughed and gave him a gentle pat on the head and let her fingers run through his hair, saying:

“Ei, ei! He’s already a real man!”, whereupon he left the room, embarrassed and stumbling, to say good night to his parents and to kiss their hands reverently, as was the custom. When he afterwards raised his face, he saw the eyes of his mother fixed upon him with such an anxious question that he was startled.

Soon he was lying in his bed upstairs in the attic, quite actually wall to wall with Frau Genoveva. It was quiet, with only the distant sound of a strummed guitar that prevented him from falling asleep, as he thought. But he soon realized that he found this faint sound disturbing only because he was paying closer attention to the music, than to whether there was the sound of stripping clothes or creaking from the bed in the heavenly chamber next door. But nothing moved; only a fine, hissing rain began to fall, and the nocturnal practitioner finally abandoned his string playing. Sleep, however, would not come. Restless and tormented by an inner heat, Peter tossed and turned in the narrow bed and finally lay on his back with his eyes open in a fever.

But suddenly his breath was taken away, because something crept into the garret under the quiet opening of the door and settled down lightly and warmly on the edge of the bed. A hand felt for his chest, in which his heart was hammering, tickling hair stroked around his cheeks, slippery lips pressed suffocatingly on his mouth, and in indescribable fear and delight the inexperienced man surrendered to unearthly sensations, felt dreamlike unknown swelling shapes, drank narcotic fragrance and, after the almost aching bliss of release, sank into a state of unconsciousness.

He only awoke at dawn, saw the sleeper next to him, felt his own limbs blissfully intertwined and inextricably mixed with hers. A soft screeching of the hinges forced his gaze to the door, which opened a hand’s breadth. He was just coming to his senses when he thought for a moment that he saw his mother’s face in the crack of the door, with such a horrified and desolate expression that he was torn up by the most violent terror. But already the shadowy, perhaps only dreamed apparition had disappeared, and the awakened woman at his side jumped up and, after a breathed kiss, fled to her chamber. Peter got up immediately, washed himself shivering in the icy water, dressed and went downstairs quietly, begging a breakfast from the maid. He pretended to want to go for a walk in the meadows, which he had done many times before.

When he returned after a haphazard wandering, uncertain whether he would be able to gain some assurance of conduct if he had to face this woman in the presence of his parents, he said to himself, "I'm going to go and see her. He found his father and mother alone and in the worst of moods. His mortal fear that the immensity of that night would be read on his forehead, vanished before what he now learned. The father grumbled angrily about a son, who would not show himself until the soup pot was on the table.

His mother sat pale, with cramped hands, as if she had suffered from reproaches. And no sooner was the second dish served and the maid out of the room than his father scolded her for the way she had prepared the food, knowing ahead of time that it was not to his liking. In the same speech, he added that it was outrageous that he had not been informed of the departure of his dear guest. Incidentally, it was absolutely unbelievable that the illness of an indifferent and far-flung relative in Linz could have caused such a hasty departure. And where had the news come from?

His mother replied haltingly that a peasant boy had brought the letter and had caused the decision of the cousin to make the visit to Linz that had been planned for later. This was all the more the case because, as the boy had informed her, a ship would be leaving for the mountain at noon. Surely the cousin would come again, his mother added with downcast eyes.

His father, growling, was busy with a chicken leg and bent over his plate. Then his mother suddenly opened her eyes and a flaming, unpleasant look met Peter's eyes, who now realized with a terrible shock that he had not been dreaming in the morning and that his mother had in some way driven the beautiful Frau Schnäbele out of the house.

When the first fearful hours had passed and the dreadful expectation of approaching disaster had receded, Peter shamefacedly tried to approach his mother and to regain her lost patronage by all kinds of attentions and services. But he was met with cold rejection and indifference. His mother never spoke a word that was in any way connected with the incident, but neither did the old relationship between her and her son ever reappear. Her increasing strangeness pained him bitterly. Later, defiantly at first, then becoming insensitive, he became accustomed to his changed life. And when his father sent him to high school in Würzburg, shortly before he died of a stroke, it was easy for Peter to say goodbye to his stern mother. Only when he stood at her deathbed and the dying woman, no longer able to speak,

held out her waxen hand as if forgivingly and with infinite effort laid it on the top of his head, the pain of the loss of her love, which had been buried for so long, was released. So he was twenty-five years old, just graduated as a doctor of law and owner of the house “zum Alten Blumenstöckel,” and had matured beyond his years.

On that fateful day, however, he was informed by chance of his uncle Martin Storck, about whom nothing could be inquired from his parents. On the contrary, his uncle’s fate was carefully concealed from him. On that day, when his parents were out of town visiting in the late afternoon, Peter, plagued by boredom, sat down with the old maid in the kitchen. Ludmilla had been his nurse from earliest childhood and clung to the boy with a stubborn tenderness that occasionally defied his parent’s domination.

On that day the maid looked up from her knitting, she fixed a long and penetrating gaze on the son of the house, and murmured, “Like the Captain of the Horse – Herr Martin-!”

Peter felt peculiarly aroused, and pressed the old woman, who seemed to him to know more about the missing man, and with childish begging, which she was never able to resist, that she should at last tell him about his uncle, since the others would not do so, and he had a right to know more about his father’s brother. Old Ludmilla was frightened, and fiercely pushed him away, but in the end she could no longer resist the desire to tell him, and, whispering anxiously and constantly listening for the door, began to tell the nephew the story of his father’s elder brother, repeatedly making him promise to keep everything safe and, for the sake of the Savior, not to tell the director of the Governorate, his father, or even his mother, which Peter willingly promised to do.

Thus he learned that his father’s brother had joined the Imperial army and had made it to the rank of cavalry captain in a cuirassier regiment. This proud and chivalrous officer, physically and mentally dissimilar to his more sedate brother, had taken as his sweetheart or bride an actress of the Carinthian Gate Theatre, a foreigner of great beauty. With her, whom he used to visit every evening to play a game of Tric-Trac and lose himself in blissful chatter about the happiness of the future, he once discovered behind a curtain, hidden from him, a little gentleman, who had been dragged out and declared that he had brought the celebrated actress some precious camellia blossoms, which were indeed lying on the table, as a thoroughly perfect gift for the celebrated actress. When the cavalry officer asked

whether the hour for such a visit did not seem a little too advanced, the high-souled snooty fop put on an aloof face and declared that in matters of the finer ways of life he would not suffer any instruction from a German. The silly smile of the man, the disgustingly sweet fragrances emanating from his silken skirt, and last but not least the guilty embarrassment of his beloved threw the cuirassier into such a frenzied rage that he wordlessly caught the preening monkey by the collar and hurled down the steep stairs of the house in Ballgasse, leaving him bleeding and groaning piteously at the bottom like a bundle of clothes. The noise attracted policemen, who were startled to discover that the badly injured man was a prince from the French embassy.

A few days later, Captain of the Horse Martin Storck was suddenly and without further justification expelled from the army by a handbill of His Majesty the Emperor Leopold or, as it was called, disgracefully cashiered from the army. Comrades of the popular officer tried to rebel against such arbitrariness, and persuaded their commander to ask the monarch for mercy for Martin Storck, even though everyone knew how strongly the emperor felt. So it was to be expected what really happened. The emperor said angrily that he could not now nor ever let it go unpunished if a bourgeois officer showed respect and deference to a person of rank in such a way, and he would consider anyone who came to him because of this Martin Storck as his fellow-servant who would be punished in the same way as his accomplice. With that, the colonel departed.

On the day this happened, the captain rushed into the apartment of his brother, Peter's father, at noon, laughed grimly, and tore the golden tassel from his sword, hurled it to the ground, and stomped on it with his feet, exclaiming loudly that he considered it the sign of an unjust and low-thinking tyrant. Whereupon the director of the governor's office, his brother, terrified, ordered him to calm down and come to his senses and also forbade him in the most serious way to make such terrible, majesty-insulting speeches in his, an Imperial official's, house.

Martin at first stared at him as if he had not heard right, then spat on the floor and exclaimed in a foaming furor:

“So I spit on you. You, you wretched servant of a shameful despot! If you, my brother from time immemorial, now also want to become Judas Iscariot to me, then do it quickly and crown it with your exceedingly contemptible attitude!”



With that, followed by his weeping sister-in-law, he left, clattering his spurs, but when he arrived in the room, which he had to pass through on his way out, he saw little Peter in the cradle in his little white tunic, immediately lifted him from the pillows and pressed him to his breast, exclaiming:

“May you one day live to see brighter times and nobler people, you little Storck! With this kiss may my soul be poured into you!”

His mother almost fainted from fright, but the little one, probably from joy at the shine of the golden buttons, cheered loudly and held out both little hands to his uncle.

“I take this as a sign, you little human being!” exclaimed the horseman, carefully putting the child back and storming off.

Only after many months did the brother and sister-in-law learn by chance that the departed man had found a new home in a lonely and dark part of the Tyrol and had settled down as a hermit. The French actress, who soon revealed that she was carrying a child under her heart, disappeared from the city of Vienna by night and fog, and no one knew where she might have gone.

The old woman’s story, intimately connected with the shock of that day by secret spiritual threads, made the deepest impression on Peter. From then on the thought of his uncle, whose fate appeared to him in romantic transfiguration as that of a noble and unhappy knight, dominated him. In many ways he imagined this tragedy of love in his waking dreams: The high cavalry officer in the white tunic with the lapels of black velvet, the weeping and hand-wringing beauty, endowed with the charms of Frau Genoveva, the trembling little French girl, twitching under the steely fist of the avenger. Sometimes, too, his inner eye saw his uncle in a black coat with fluttering hair, a deep indelible wrinkle between the dark brows, in the sulphurous light of the lightnings, shaken by thunder, standing on jagged rocky reefs, boldly challenging the powers of heaven and hell.

Only in the roaring life of a young man of the green and rose-colored Franks at Würzburg did these images fade from the imaginings of the day, only to appear all the more often in nocturnal dream visions, in which a certain Peter himself became the angry lover and the actress no longer appeared at all but in the form of the woman who had taken possession of him in that distant night. But the dream always ended with an unacknowledged, terrible apparition, which frightened him in the most

horrible way, without ever becoming clear, until he was awakened by a frightening palpitation of the heart and shortness of breath. It took a very long time until these dream images also weakened and faded.

In any case, the letter from the Bavarian district court had caused him no small excitement, and without hesitation he set out on the mail coach journey from Vienna to Innsbruck to get there and find his suddenly disappeared uncle as quickly as possible, or at least to give his body an honest burial, in case the latter had met with a fatal accident.

Here, on the banks of the river that flowed down from the Highlands and in which the mountains of the Sankt Marein were also reflected, the memory of the idol of his youth flared up again with all its strength. He felt as if he were bound to the lonely man by unbreakable, mysterious bonds, as if it were up to him to in some way help the man who had fled from a world full of lies and perfidy. His desire to know more, even everything, about his uncle became stronger the closer he came to his goal, and the thought of having to wait the rest of the day and a long night for the mail coach to leave seemed almost unbearable to him.

Raucous singing and clanging bollards made him look up. A Bavarian battery, with horses snorting and wet with sweat, rattled past him. They were probably coming from a drill, the gunners were singing, the young lieutenant was making his bay horses dance. The wind blew the strong smell of horse bodies, leather, sweat, and wagon grease to him. He got up and walked back to the town in the swirling dust behind the procession. In the west the sky glowed a fiery gold.

But as small and narrowly built as the city was, he lost his way and got into all sorts of alleyways. Two peasants, high pointed hats on their heads, leaned against a wall smoking and looking at the approaching man with pondering glances. He asked them about the Golden Eagle Inn. But the gray-haired man, to whom he had addressed his question, scowled at the stranger's High German and said loudly and with clear reference to the other:

"The Bavarian spies would like to know more than the way to the inn. Better keep their beaks clean!", whereupon both of them turned their backs to him and walked on.

When, after a short search, he found the stately inn, he had to be careful in the blood-slicked hallway not to bump into the buckets and troughs that stood around everywhere. A pig had been slaughtered, and dark

red bacon-cubed stuffing was oozing out of the spatter from the intestines lying in loose piles. Also a gray liver mixture, which busy hands stuffed into a tin casing and pushed the end of the intestine over the mouth. With anxiously ruffled coattails Peter climbed the spiral staircase and entered the guest room.

Next door, the gentlemen's room to which he wanted to go was occupied by officers from the Bavarian Kinkel regiment. There were younger and older gentlemen, all plain and simple people, who were looking forward to the Sow Dance and the barrel with local beer that was standing in the corner. So Peter sat down outside in the bar room at a folding table in the window alcove. Apart from him, there was only one guest in the room, a huge, wild-bearded and ruffled peasant with blackish skin, who sat all alone at the nearest table, above which hung a silver-plated guild sign. Against the wall leaned a highly packed rucksack and a Gryphon hatchet with a long sharp tooth, which the lumberjacks use in the mountain ash and rough grazing country. A heavy bundle of pig iron bars lay on the ground. The waitress came, a pretty but sullen girl, placed a pewter oil lamp on the table for the strange gentleman, and with a hairpin pulled the wick out a little. Grouchily she asked about the guest's desire, recommending the fresh sausages. Peter ate when the dish was placed before him, and drank red wine with it. When he had eaten, the stout landlord came to him, politely lifted his flail cap and sat down at the table with him. From the gentlemen's room sounded a coarse male voice, which seemed to sing juicy verses, as one could easily guess from the laughter thundering off in between.

The innkeeper had brought the guestbook and an earthenware pot with brown ink. Peter dipped the badly cut quill and wrote, while the landlord's gaze followed his hand. As it drew the word "Vienna," the innkeeper laid his roundish paw confidentially on Peter's fingers.

"Just in from Vienna?" the man whispered. "One of the gentlemen our emperor sends on a scouting trip, perhaps, to see how things are in the Tyrol?"

Peter denied it, the whispering made him uncomfortable, and so he said aloud that he had come to check on his uncle's estate at Sankt Marein in the Upper Inn Valley.

A chair crashed to the ground, causing the innkeeper and guest to startle. The wild-bearded man at the next table had jumped up for no

apparent reason. His broad light-green hat slid off the table, and his hobnailed shoe clanked against the iron bars. From the black, wide-open eyes, a look of astonishment, anger and curiosity flashed across to Peter. But immediately the dark glow went out, the man bent down grumbling for the chair and pushed it back into place. Then he picked up his hat and wiped the silk of the brim with the sleeve of his jacket. Thus the evil in his eyes had probably only been fright at his own clumsiness.

The innkeeper did not pay any attention to the insignificant incident; he was moved by other things. For him, the fine handsome gentleman with the blond sideburns and the young, intelligent face was, despite his denial, a secret messenger of the emperor and could well know something comforting. So he began to ask: Whether the good Kaiser Franz had forgotten the country altogether? Couldn't he chase out the Bavarian rascals with his many soldiers? Is the Lord a good Catholic? Then everything would be right. It would be good if the gentlemen in Vienna knew how things looked here and what the poor people had to suffer.

Again roaring laughter flew after an incomprehensible verse. The innkeeper's fist clenched.

"Yellow arsenic should be poured into the foreign beer that they drink, the wildlings. How can an innkeeper survive if the guests bring the drink themselves?"

"Are the Bavarians really so bad?" asked Peter incredulously, "I know them from Würzburg, too, and I think they are not too different from the Austrians. They're still better than the French we had in Vienna."

The innkeeper laughed disdainfully.

"The French? Oh my, they'll never come. They're still scared shitless from '96. Back then we helped them out. The devil would have to have his tail in the game if we didn't succeed with the Bavarians, too!"

With quiet malice Peter pointed to the picture of the Bavarian king on the wall and the flags with the blue and white fusils, which decorated the wall above the bar table. The innkeeper shifted his hood with his hand and scratched his iron-gray hair.

"What can you do?" he growled. "Shall I let them take away my justice? They'll lock my cellar and house if I don't tolerate that stuff here. And I have to live. That's why everything is black and yellow inside."

The waitress ran past with new sausage and cabbage bowls, pushed the door shut behind her with her foot and shrieked inside, being roughly

touched. Highly red she came out again and slammed the door into the laughter that followed her.

“I wasn’t aware of that, that the Bavarians are so badly hated here,” Peter said, somewhat astonished. “They are otherwise good people.”

“Good?!” the innkeeper hissed, his face turning blue-red. “You call the Viennese good? Of course, I have always been told that there is no faith left in the Viennese city. Good? They have forbidden us the Christmas Masses, the beautiful colored glass balls may never shine in Holy Week at the holy grave, the pious monastery people are expelled from the country. It must be true that Satan is their commander-in-chief and master. How else can Christians punish the Sacristan who rings the little bell when one of them is laid out in a procession? The Capuchin and Franciscan Fathers led them to Altötting in hay wagons and locked them up, as they do with sinful priests. The poor people, the sick and the crippled weep in front of the closed gates, from which they usually get monastery soup and bread. And they put the young boys in uniforms and make them soldiers, which is a disgrace and has never been allowed in Tyrol since the world began.”

Loud shouting from the small room interrupted him. He stood up with difficulty.

“The gentlemen officers want to pay,” he said, grasping for the blackboard and chalk and went inside.

Peter thoughtfully swallowed the tart red wine and looked over again at the shaggy giant, who from time to time blinked at him.

Silver money rang next door, sabers rattled. Bluecoats poured out of the door. A young lieutenant stopped in front of the peasant. He swayed a little:

“Hey, Countryman!” he shouted, “What have you got in your rucksack?”

The peasant made no reply. His eyes, which had been lively a moment ago, had become dull and stupid.

“Leave him, Crailsheim,” slurred a fat captain. “The animal is drunk, after all. Come, brother!”

Laughing, they clanked out and rumbled down the stairs. Peter let out another whistle and lit his pipe.

Then a girl entered the room, looked around for a moment, and then went straight up to the peasant, who rose respectfully and sat down again only after repeated coercion.

Peter felt a quiet fine twinge in his heart. In all his life he had never seen a woman of such perfect loveliness. The young lady, for that was what she was, carried a broad-brimmed hat in her gracefully rounded arm. The small slender feet were in shiny leather shoes, which were tied crosswise. A precious crimson shawl that draped her slender shoulders revealed a viola brown wool dress further down. The black curls of the petite head framed an ivory, delicate face of indescribably touching beauty. The night-dark big eyes, the tiny, softly smiling mouth, the small, perfectly straight nose, gave the young face a noble beauty reminiscent of the most wonderful Greek works of art. The young man felt as if he had to rush to this angelic apparition and fall on his knees in adoration. Never had anything similar happened to him. The pipe, of which he was suddenly ashamed, fell from his hand, and without being able to think clearly, he started at the supernatural apparition.

The girl, meanwhile, spoke very softly to the peasant, who listened with peculiarly awkward tenderness, quite devoted, and nodding his head eagerly and it seemed that he was listening to the lady's wishes or messages. Gently he took a small packet from her slender hand and immediately concealed it in his bib. Then the beauty stood up and took her leave. The bearded head bent to kiss her hand.

She passed Peter's table, and for the first time raised her lowered eyelids and looked at him full. For a tiny particle of time her dark sucking gaze blazed into his, a golden tone ran over her cheeks and then she was gone as quickly as she had entered.

For a long time Peter sat in a kind of paralysis, striving to hold on to the lovely image. For a second he had wanted to jump up, to hurry after her. But he retained enough sense to refrain from this ridiculous and foolish start. The youthful flush of rashness turned into a dreamy melancholy. He felt as if fortune had just passed him by, had given him a single glance as a gift for life. The thought that tomorrow the mail coach would take him away to unknown distant places and that he would probably never see this lovely creature again, filled him with that sweet sadness which is peculiar to youth, when strong impressions of love press themselves into the heart.

The peasant seemed to have waited only for the arrival of the stranger. Immediately after her departure he paid for what he had consumed, got up, lifted the heavy pack effortlessly onto his shoulders, reached for the grisly axe, and then picked up the heavy bundle of clanking iron rods as if

playing. With a heavy step, without a greeting, he stomped out of the tavern.

“What a rascal!” the innkeeper sneered behind him. “But he has strength in him. - Moidl, show the gentleman his room!”

Peter stood up.

“Who was the young lady?” he asked quietly.

The landlord shrugged his shoulders. “Can’t serve the master,” he said. “Haven’t seen her before. A clean one, eh?”

He grimaced and clicked his tongue.

In the small vaulted room, a tallow candle flickered in the copper chandelier. Peter reached for the cleaning scissors and pinched the ashes from the wick. A mother of God, seven bright swords in her bleeding heart, faithfully guarded his upholstered high bed. Faint musty scents came from the upholstery. The storm still blew from the south, brushed around the house, cried in the chimney and pounded on the windows. The roar of the river was muffled.

Sleep came in the singing dark and brought all sorts of things. The Emperor Franz passed by, in his long wrinkled face there was a maliciously sullen expression, the narrow lips moved scornfully.

“So a nephew of that malcontent Captain Storck?” he asked, smiling treacherously. “I have something in mind for you, young man!”

At the coach stop, the innkeeper in the green velvet vest served, “Lovely to see you your Grace – in all humility -” Strings were buzzing, a coarse drunken bass voice growled:

“Girl, lie down here with me, so that I can feel you even better!”

But there stood the black peasant and blocked the alley. This way, Peter knew went to the beautiful girl. He was about to pass, when the giant’s enormous hairy hand reached for him.... Groaning, he lay under the spell of the nightmare, woke up with a choking cry and heard the March rain drumming on the windows. Then he fell into a dreamless slumber.

## SECTION TWO

The next day he climbed into the stagecoach freezing and with a strange anxiety. The stagecoach driver cracked the whip, the wheels crunched. The beautiful girl remained in Innsbruck.

When he got out of the coach at the destination of the journey, stiff with cold and battered by the shocks of the bad springs, he looked around. All around the land lay white and quiet, deeply buried under soft snow that had blown in after the warm weather.

Peter wondered about the many people standing in front of the Inn of the post office. But he soon saw that their attention was neither on the stagecoach that had arrived nor on him. A terribly struggling group drew his gaze. A very young, deathly pale nun with a white winged cap and black robe, held with difficulty by two sisters from the convent, twisted in horrible convulsions. She reared up, throwing her upper body rapidly back and forth so that the white hood almost touched the floor and the heels of her clumsy shoes. Foam came out of her mouth; her eyeballs were twisted whitish, her hands bent spasmodically.

A madwoman perhaps, a sick woman at any rate. Gripped by horror, Peter saw that a priest was standing before her, a gaunt man with a stern face and deep-set eyes. His fox-red full beard blew in the cold wind, the short cropped hair surrounded his tonsure and Capuchin cap in a fiery wreath, the cowl wrapped around the body; a crumpled choir shirt was pulled over it and over the shoulders laid the purple and gold stole.

The sight was frightening and eerie. Many women were on their knees, oblivious to the snow slush that drenched them, men with hard faces stared in bewilderment, children cried out. The nuns, who held the sick woman with all their might, had their teeth chattering.

Peter stood rooted to the spot before such a completely surprising sight. What invisible force was twisting and shaking the poor nun's body so cruelly? From blue lips in the pale distorted face the swollen tongue stretched, the bitten mouth seemed to want to form sentences. Shrieking, cutting cries went up, the eyes bulged forward, and a twitching tremor ran through her limbs. Then a deep male voice roared from her:



“Pitchach ziach zo! Joho! You goddess, you lump of dough you! Bitch, bitch, I’ll smash you!”

A young peasant had to rush to the sisters’ aid to save the nun, who was flailing in convulsions, from harm to herself and others. Reddish saliva ran down her chin, the wing hood fell and revealed the short-cut dark hair.

“What, bitch, just wait, you baked goddess,” it cried, “You have no power over me and mine!

Then the Capuchin took one of the broad ends of his stole, adorned with gold borders sewn on in the shape of a cross, and placed it on the nun’s head. His voice sounded powerfully over the breathlessly listening people:

“*Adjuro te, diabole, ut hanc creaturam Veronicam ...* - I beseech you, devil, that you should not let this creature Veronica...”

“Away, away!” it roared hoarsely from the possessed.

“*Alopech, alohach, Sabbathei!* Leave the bitch – brother – leave the bitch -”

She thrashed her head wildly back and forth, threw the stole down onto her neck, and closed her eyes. She swallowed and groaned. And all at once the agonizingly contorted face smoothed out, a pitiful poor smile played briefly around the mouth, the posture became natural, and Peter heard the Ursuline woman say in a dull and gentle voice, “To the Lord God be praise and glory, for today he gives rest and can rise no more.”

“How do you feel, Sister?” asked the clergyman.

“So tired, enough to die!” she answered weakly.

“Fear not!” cried the priest, his eyes glowing zealously.

“He must and shall go forth, the stinking infernal! Didn’t he promise yesterday with a whimper that he would leave you on Sunday at noon, if I did not come again with the little box, in which there is a sacred thread from the Holy Robe of the Savior? He is not the first to be expelled by me, Sister Veronica, and, as I say, next Sunday you will be, by God’s grace delivered from Beelzebub’s possession.”

The nun bent low to kiss the monk’s hand. The sisters led her away. Her feet barely carried her. With a clattering beat the brass coins and the cross with the small bony skull of the rosary clanged together.

“Pray!” the Capuchin shouted, booming over the frozen crowd. “Watch and pray, for Satan walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. - Our Father, who art...”

Murmurs of many voices arose. Peter, shivering, pulled his coat to himself, three steps behind him was the gate to the Inn of the post office. Unseen he disappeared into the hallway. When he entered the large guest room with the wooden bar, he saw only the stage coach driver who had brought him and two tables away a bear-like stout gentleman sitting with a yellow walrus mustache hanging over his lips. Two glaring blue eyes peered out of curling tobacco smoke at his entrance, new heavy clouds sprouted from the meerscham pipe.

“Good friend!” Peter addressed the driver. “Tell me where in this place I can meet the Bavarian district official?”

But before the stage coach driver could answer, a dull, rumbling voice came out of the clouds of smoke:

“Here he sits, the Bavarian bailiff, as he lives and breathes. Who are you? What do you want?”

Peter approached the table, gave his name and pulled out his papers to identify himself. The strict man looked through everything carefully and then made a hand gesture toward a chair.

“Sit down!” he said.

Peter sat down. An elderly waitress trotted in, as the bailiff gave a shrill whistle on two fingers, with an “Would you like to order, gracious Herr Bailiff?”

“Beer for the gentleman and stationery for me!” he ordered shortly.

“So you’re the Herr Storck who’s taking over the Zeitlanghof up there in the meantime? What? How? A Viennese? How can a Viennese stay here for more than three hours? By the way, - von Pflederer is my name!”

Peter politely referred to the letter of instructions that he had followed and asked him to give him more details.

The bailiff made no reply for the moment, stirred with his quill in the dried ink that had been placed on the table, folded up the document and wrote on the outer edge with thick strokes:

“Seen! Approved! v. Pflederer.”

Then he took a brass stamp out of his jacket pocket, spat on it, rubbed the surface a little against his shoe, and pressed a pale blackish seal on the paper.

“So!” he said, and then took a long swig from the glass. “If you show the paper to the Rose innkeeper up there, he will take you out to Zeitlanghof

with the keys. Got it? Up in Sankt Marein, I mean. How long do you want to stay?" he asked, looking sharply at Peter.

"Until I find out what fate has befallen my uncle!" said Peter.

"What? Fate? He must have fallen, the old man. Always wandering around alone in the mountains!"

"Or murdered..." Peter replied and his voice quivered. All of a sudden this thought had risen in him.

"Oh, Who!" the official laughed angrily. "Nobody has been murdered here. What are you thinking? Who could have done it? Whereas your uncle has done the obdurate peasants nothing but good deeds. He never carried any money with him. - Herr, what are you up to?"

He suddenly moved at Peter, and his face turned red.

"Do you think we don't care about anything? Don't investigate at all when a person disappears just like that, just disappears? How? What? Do you want to see the file? Two commissions went up, the people themselves helped to search, two avalanches were dug up. We have done our duty, young Herr. Remember that!"

Peter hastened to express his conviction that he was convinced of the official efforts of the Bavarian government agency. But still - he considered it his duty also to do everything in his turn to shed light on the abrupt disappearance of his uncle.

"So, in a word, you are cleverer and more capable than the district authorities. Can only be good for me. Save me the trouble, Herr smart aleck. Now drink, I can't stand to see someone letting the fresh foam melt on his beer. - So! You'll have to look around for a cutter to carry your luggage up. A pig's way, a cursed one! And dear people! They have skulls as hard as stone, they are cleverer and more devious than forest foxes, more secretive than the treasury in Munich. It is a cross and torture without equal with the peasants here. So it's really only because of your uncle and the official letter?" He looked appraisingly at Peter from half-closed eyelids.

"I don't know..." said Peter, hurt by the tone.

The bailiff tapped his pipe into the earthen ashtray that stood on the table, cleared his throat, spat in an arc on the floor, and then said furtively:

"Not even an order from Vienna in your pocket? Not even a little stirring up of the good Tyrolean's loyal to the emperor against the Bavarians? I should be very surprised, if it wasn't so..."

“I have neither received orders for such things, nor would I have the time and inclination to do so,” Peter returned with sharpness. “I want to take this opportunity to tell you, Herr Bailiff that I did not learn from the Würzburg Franks to take insults sitting down!”

The Bavarian’s face lit up with a start. He burst into loud merry laughter, and roughly punched Storck on the shoulder:

“Hohoho! Würzburg Franconians? Apple green and peach red? What is Laurenz Bartenstein doing with his big dog? And Kropff? Does Thomann still drink so much? God of the Cross Saxon - I fought with a brother of the Franconian Stepf in Erlangen. Yes, of course you’re right! Hey, beer here, you cripple!”

The waitress ran.

“You’ve got plenty of time,” he soothed, seeing Peter’s quiet impatience. “You won’t go up for more than three hours, and I’ll see to a porter. But as for the former - I revoke and deprecate anything and everything! You know, I have to be more careful than ever! There are all kinds of suspicious guys around...with letters from Vienna and so on. They don’t like us, the pious Tyroleans. Between us, they started it stupidly, got involved in everything. With their churches, priests and bells, they can’t take a joke here. You have seen the foolish convent woman, haven’t you? What do you think I should do? Arrest the priest, send him to Munich, close the monastery, I think there are ten women in it altogether? Write a report from here to there - long and to the point? And then have the entire Upper Inn Valley on my back! Thank you very much. What’s it to me? Let them cast out devils from me as well, or where ever the fool’s tower is. I don’t care about it. And if my colleagues had kept it that way, there would have been peace and quiet long ago, and no one in the country would weep about the Austrians and their bad money.”

Peter ate and drank, and in the company of the bailiff his heart was lighter than it had been after the ghastly spectacle on his arrival.

The bailiff did not hide his frank remarks about the ineptitude with which the Tyrolean’s were treated, and he went on about the clever people in Munich, who issued orders, decrees and measures from the green table, which almost always caused mischief. The new trade blockade against Tyrol had shut down the large linen and cotton goods factory in Imst. Hundreds of poor people from the Upper Inn Valley through that had lost their bread. When they wanted to look for work abroad, the Munich

government forbade them to emigrate. So they loitered around begging and were incited by the parched school teachers, who could neither live nor die on their fifty guilders a year. Robbers had also appeared, boys who had escaped from their compulsory military service and had gathered in the mountain forests. The spirit of discontent was becoming more and more widespread and the garrisons were too weak. He did not know which donkey was reading his, the district officer's, reports, but nothing of what he proposed, was done or not done. Yes, it is a misery to have to sit here, drink bad beer and write your fingers to the bone for nothing and nothing again.

And the end was always a nose for him, the Bailiff von Pflederer. Yes, but now he really needed to stop - otherwise Herr Storck would probably get home into the twilight of the evening. And that would not be good. But don't forget to go down into the valley and have a look around! One could make oneself a Lätizerl with a brave roasted goose, stuffed with apples and boxes.

“What? How? And what I wanted to say: Bartenstein's brother is a lieutenant with Kinkel.”

The farewell was downright cordial. The bailiff went with Peter to the door of the inn, even taking the luggage into his care until the messenger could bring it. The waitress opened her mouth wide in amazement; a few peasants who passed by almost forgot to lift their hats. No one had ever seen the bailiff as affable as with the young gentleman in the cantilevered coat.

“One more thing,” the official said in a hushed voice. “I don't have much power up there. Who can oversee all these villages and homes? As far as I know, it's even darker down there than it is down here. Living devils are said to walk about there, and at night one hears the poor souls weeping in the distance. I believe, Herr Storck that you will come down again soon. Well, God be with you, and goodbye!”

He waved for a while, enclosed by the pipe smoke.

## SECTION THREE

**P**eter walked down the lane through the wet snow, crossed the fields on a well-trodden path and climbed up the hill past the blue and white striped signpost. A few red-breasted crossbills whistled softly in the budding blackthorn. Gray-green Juniper shrubs stood on the clay-yellow, snow-free slope. The trail turned, leading into tall timber that groaned under heavy white burdens. Bright tears hung in the whiskers of larches and spruces. From a broken treetop a goshawk swooped down with a shrill hunting call. Sometimes snow fell on snow with a dull sound. From far away came melodic humming and a deep organ sound.

But at a bend the sound became a wild roar. High above a milky, foaming, light-green white water, the not very broad path led through small falls blue-silvery mica blocks glistened.

Breathing faster than usual, Peter stopped for a short rest and looked down into the rushing water that boiled around wildly scattered boulders that hissed and splashed up. Splintered bleached tree corpses rose from bubbling cauldrons, green dripping moss hung full of clear beads. The terrible mill of the stream ground and turned the rock into balls. Round and smooth they lay, half buried in the alluvial sand of the bank, black, and yellow-veined marble, dark red porphyry, and green serpentine. Between some pieces flashed the golden platelets of ore gravel. Mountain ash stems, young and slender, sprouted from bird-dispersed seed, stray pine trees hard by the shore trembled under the shocks the water made against the half-washed bottom. Steel blue and emerald, a colorful metallic flash, a kingfisher whistled by.

For a long time the path went on beside the roar and bluster. Snow slid treacherously underfoot, a stone came loose, rumbled down the slope, splashed up, touching hidden rock with a hard sound, and disappeared into the water. The path lifted, steered into ancient coniferous woods and ended in a cruelly deforested clearing with snow-covered foliage and hooded tree stumps.

Here a small sudden fright surged through Peter. Under the only remaining trunk, a silver-gray, debarked tree killed by lightning, sat a

motionless man, almost invisible in his colorless robe. It was an old man with a completely bald head and beardless face. Peter saw him very closely, looking straight into the piercing dark eyes of a stern, sharply cut face with a narrow curved nose and tightly closed lips.

As unkind and hard as this well-formed countenance seemed, it exercised an inexplicable charm on Peter. He felt as if he had seen this old man before, perhaps seen in a dream. Under the hairy fur coat that the old man wore around his shoulders, the short leather pants and the wood-brown naked knees peeked out. The sinewy hand held a short mountain staff with a long bare iron tip, more spear weapon than staff. Strappy shoes protected the feet.

The figure looked most dignified, rejecting any kind of approach.

Peter straightened, took a step toward the stranger. It was ridiculous - but Peter literally had to summon up his courage as he addressed the silent man a question about the further way. No answer came back at all. Only the eyes seemed to be alive, sneering and gazing in haughty wonder. Peter thought at first that he was looking at a deaf person and repeated the question louder. Something like a mocking smile went around the old man's harsh mouth. With ease he suddenly stood up, turned around briefly and disappeared among the trees. The gait was almost youthful, the posture exceedingly proud.

The young man looked after the stranger in amazement and annoyance. He felt that the stranger had treated him with deliberate disdain, even with complete contempt. It was not a halfway friendly reception that was given to him there. The blood rose in his cheeks as he continued his hike.

But an even greater surprise awaited him when, after crossing the clear cut area, he entered a deep and dense forest. A loud "Stop!" made him stop. In the middle of snow-covered spruces, a small red fire was glowing, around which several neglected-looking boys were huddled. They wore tattered green soldier's coats with black edging, and two, who must have been keeping watch, pointed the rusty barrels of their carbines at the newcomer. The hammers clicked as they were cocked.

"Stand still Bavarian sow, or else the evil enemy will have your Lutheran soul!" cried the taller of the two hoarsely, who wore a dirty cloth over his left eye.

Calmly, Peter handed over his passport for them to look at. They deciphered it with difficulty, others joined in. When at last they discovered

that the stranger had come from Vienna they were obviously embarrassed. The rifles lowered, one, who probably was the leader, handed him back the booklet.

“We didn’t mean to offend the Lord,” he said tamely. “Just have to watch our skin. Because if they catch us, it may be that we must even hang. On the other hand, a gracious penny wouldn’t hurt us, a little something for a schnapps or wine. It is now cold in the nights and we are all hungry together.”

The man who was stopped gave plenty when he saw the frostbitten fingers and pale faces. The boys thanked him nicely. They were deserters from the light infantry, battalion infantry, which the Bavarians had raised in Tyrol against the old law of the land. When they marched out, three hundred of them had escaped. Some of them had fled into the Engadin.

“Yes, Herr” said the one with the bandaged eye, “as the flayer catches the dogs, so they have caught us. Patrols have entered every house, searched everything and stabbed into the hay with their bayonets. If they caught a boy in such a way, he had to appear before the commission and from a leather cup throw five dice onto the table. Those who threw the highest dice were immediately forced into the hunter’s coat. The Axamsers, who did not put up with it, rang the bell and chased away a whole battalion of Bavarians. But they came back, the dogs, and now the people of Axams have to pay twice for it.”

One laughed out.

“But in the letters they carry through the country, it says that another creature is to come to the Tyrol...”

“You shut your mouth, Jackele!” the one with the bandage snapped at him. “Who told you to talk about it?”

The man blushed and fell silent.

“I, for example, was bitten by such a murderous dog, as I lay hidden in the hay barn,” groaned the other, pointing to his bandaged eye. Peter stepped toward him and pushed back the glued bandage. Pus oozed from between the swollen lids. Shriveled, the eyeball swam in the decomposed blood. He shuddered and slid the cloth over the wound.

“The eye is gone!” he said.

“Better an eye is gone than the land!” the man replied. “And now clear the way! The gentleman passes!”

Peter shook hands with the poor fellows and went on his way.



So that's how it looked in Tyrol, in the land that had been lost to Austria and for which Vienna was not particularly grieved. The Danube city had quickly recovered from the misfortunes of the French period. The shortage of money was great, but life in Vienna had never been more brilliant and effervescent than it was right now. At the beginning of the past year, on January 1, 1808, the magnificent Apollo Hall had been opened, with its waterworks, flower groves and Moorish chambers, in which the nobility of Vienna had dined from heavy silver plates. The strangers were delighted at how courteously and willingly they were received, raving about the beauty of Viennese women and their graceful complaisance. People drank, laughed, danced on the mirrored floor, enjoyed the easily conquered favor of love, and enjoyed bloody animal fights, fairy-tale fireworks and dazzling theatrical performances. What was the point of the poor backward little country, which the emperor had ceded to the Bavarian king by Napoleon's grace for the sake of the peace he longed for? The few who suffered from the German misery and disgrace, could not sleep in the horror of sorrowful nights, they were neither noble nor rich in influence. Moreover, it was advisable to keep expressions of discontent to themselves.

And he, Peter Storck? Had he ever thought about the fates of the people here? Ever mourned the degradation of the homeland that the Welshman had stripped, deprived, enslaved?

Peter heaved a deep sigh. A jay screeched in fright and flew along for a distance, puzzled by the man in the coat talking to himself. A black squirrel jumped up snapping at a trunk so that snow drizzle fell on the hiker.

He had to climb a good while with his gloomy thoughts until the height was reached and the path was almost level. In a hollow of the valley he saw the shingle-gray, stone-weighted roofs of Sankt Marein, just visible in the falling twilight. A pointed church steeple poked into the darkening sky.

The first house he came to was a stately white building with an old brown wooden walkway running around it. On a long iron arm above the door swayed an artificially forged and over-gilded rose. That was his goal for today and he was glad of it.

As he entered the dark hallway, a hubbub of voices rang out at him from a half-open door. Numerous peasants were sitting at the tables in front of glasses of wine and booze. It was a Sunday, which had attracted so many to the inn. A quick stir went through the paneled parlor when the city-

dressed stranger entered, sharp glances flashing from under wide-brimmed hats and pointed mountain hats.

A tall blond-bearded man, good-natured, looking almost childlike out of beautiful blue eyes, who, pouring a large bottle of wine, had gone from table to table, paused in his activity and looked tensely at the newcomer. An oil lamp cast deep, calm light into the chamber, and two iron wall holders crackled with burning pine shavings.

“What does the gentleman want with us?” asked the innkeeper, stepping in front of Peter. “I can’t accommodate the gentleman, nor is there a place free to sit down,” he added not exactly friendly.

Peter gave his name and asked whether he was looking at Christian Lergetpohrer, the innkeeper of the Rose. With a brighter face, the innkeeper answered in the affirmative, then turned to the peasants and said in a very rough dialect:

“People, you must not be afraid, - it is Herr Storck, about whom it has been written to Vienna.

And then he stretched out his hand to Peter.

“There is room for you, Herr, and a good bed is also ready, until you want to live in the Zeitlanghof.

That is no longer advisable today. Tomorrow we will go up and you shall take over from my hands the keys and everything else.”

The peasants had risen to their feet. Some slowly drew their hats, whispering among themselves. A place was cleared, and Peter, unaccustomed to climbing was quite glad to stretch his tired feet under the table.

“Notburga! Bring the gentleman food and wine!” the innkeeper called out into the hallway.

Peter did not feel very comfortable in the air thick with the smell of greasy cloth and pungent tobacco. He looked around, looked into curious, suspicious and cold eyes, into faces that looked as if they were carved from wood, unmoving, stubborn and furtive.

A younger person at one of the neighboring tables was the only one who looked at him with open friendliness, with a desire to get to know him. He seemed to be ill. His sunken cheeks showed sharply defined redness and his eye shone feverishly. But Peter had no time to look at him long, for at the end of the table a little man shot up, stooped and white-haired, a sharp hooked nose in a face riddled with innumerable wrinkles and pointed at him

with his index finger and crowed in incomprehensible guttural sounds something that could not be understood.

The innkeeper did the interpreting.

“Old Josele Patscheider inquires whether Herr Storck has the Christian Catholic faith.”

It was the same question that the innkeeper at the Eagle Inn had addressed to him in the capital. Peter answered in the affirmative, and a general murmur of satisfaction showed him how important this confession was taken here.

“I suppose many Bavarians are Catholic, too,” said a deep voice.

“But the gentleman is from Vienna, Mesner, you might already know that,” the innkeeper rebuked the speaker in the dark skirt. “And in the imperial city they will probably have the right faith, don’t you think?”

“It is only that which is known for certain,” the man apologized.

A tall girl of austere beauty, golden-haired and rosy-cheeked, entered, placed a pewter plate of cold venison, a large piece of gray barley bread and a measure of red wine in front of Peter, looked at him from clear blue eyes and wished a blessed meal. A faint blush slid over her face as Peter’s hand happened to brush against her bare arm. He saw at once that the slender girl must be the landlord’s sister. He would gladly have addressed a few friendly words to her, but she immediately left the room again.

He had become hungry, by the way, and did full credit to the simple meal. For the rest, it did not escape his notice that all the people at the tables seemed to be expecting something; that it was talked about in relation to him and some doubt about his person had not yet disappeared.

Only the innkeeper and the sickly-looking young man at the next table seemed to have full confidence in him. He clearly noticed that they were asking questions that were obviously directed at him. Finally, Christian Lergetpohrer seemed to want to put an end to it. He stood in the middle of the room, and commanded silence with a gesture of his hand, and spoke into the deep silence that instantly arose, in a firm and loud voice.

“Men, there is no one here who has not known our cavalry captain, Herr Martin Storck, well, and several of you must be grateful to him for great good deeds, though he is gone from us now, and no one knows where. If it is the will of God, we will know it yet, and in the meantime we must pray for him. The gentleman who has joined us is his brother’s child, well Austrian, has the right faith and will dwell on the Zeitlanghof. There is no

need for us to conceal our concern from him, as if he were a spy. Whoever wants to offend him, I would have to expel from this house, so now everyone knows how to judge for himself. And now, Voglsanger read out the docket to us all, but slowly and quite clearly, so that everyone can hear it well and also understand it well. This letter was brought from Sterzing at the risk of his life and copied many times by the school teacher in Ried and is being read out in all places at this hour. And now pay attention diligently!”

Voglsanger, a spry peasant with bushy whiskers, stood up, let his gaze pass over the assembly until he briefly examined Peter once again, and then with solemn formality pulled a red folded cloth from his jacket pocket, in which a folded letter sheet was wrapped.

Breathless silence was in the room as he began to read.

“Dear Herr Forester! In the name of God, I begin my letter as best I can, and I sincerely hope that you and all the dear relatives in the upper Inn Valley are quite healthy and well. And it is known to you that the deer in our area have gotten out of hand and are causing more damage from one day to the next.

So, with divine help, we want to hold a big hunt in the month of April and hope that it will be a lot of fun. Many guests are invited and a distinguished gentleman shall also be among them. We want to get the wild animals under control when we start the hunt properly. With other guests that are announced from many valleys, all good marksmen and we also ask you to come with the whole friendship.

There is no news but that unknown persons have stolen many sacks of good gunpowder from the royal Bavarian powder mill in Achenrain. If you have too few hop sticks, there are three hundred of them ready for you. Scythes are also there for you when it is time to cut. At the beginning of April look at your fishing water and see if the Alps are already without snow. Many greetings to you in the name of God and the Holy Virgin.

Your faithful friend Teimer,  
Tobacco merchant in Klagenfurt.”

Voglsanger carefully folded the paper, put it back into the red cloth and stashed it in his pocket. He looked around expectantly. Joyful, excited murmurs went from one table to another.

“Teimer?”

The name passed from mouth to mouth, and seemed to have a good ring to it. Questions were asked in urgent whispers.

“Has everyone understood?”

Voglsanger’s voice sounded once more.

“Understood well!” shouted one of the crowd, “Every child understands, what is to be said with the hunt and the game. But that with the fishing water and the mountains, I don’t understand.”

“Oh, you fool!” laughed the innkeeper. “It is said that at the beginning of April everyone should pay attention to the river and the mountains for signs.”

“Yes so! Then it’s all right!”

Peter very soon realized what these silent, secretive people were up to. The letter was easy to understand even for him, the uninitiated. An uprising was preparing, initiated by simple yet effective means. The fact that the “hop sticks” meant rifles and that the announcement of the powder theft pointed to the necessary extent of the existing need for firearms was readily understandable. But how did these poor peasants, in this sparsely populated country defy the well-trained Bavarian army? A frightening sadness came over him. He would have liked to talk them out of what he thought was a dangerous and nonsensical undertaking, but his mind told him that it could be bad for him. Even now there was not confidence throughout the room, which could be read from many a look directed at him.

Nevertheless, he dared to strike up a cautious conversation with his bench neighbor, a serious and level-headed man. Like the Innsbruck innkeeper, he immediately inundated him with questions that were almost fervently about the emperor in Vienna. Peter answered as well as he could, endeavored to instill confidence in the other and was strangely moved when the latter said thoughtfully:

“My dear Herr, I just think that a thing is about to begin. But how it goes out, that is known to no one.”

A wild babble of voices interrupted him. A fist thundered on the top of the other table.

“You’re a scoundrel, Federspiel!” shouted one of them.

The pale man, who had repeatedly looked at Peter in a friendly way, jumped up.

His breath almost failed as he exclaimed, "You won't say that again, Hornauss!"

"And ten times again, and twenty times; whoever talks like you..."

The innkeeper intervened and separated the disputants.

"What is it?" he shouted loudly, "who wants to look at my house from outside?"

"Federspiel - the runaway student -" several of them shouted in confusion.

The young man stood up. There was not a drop of blood in his decayed face. With a defiant movement of his head he threw back his long hair and spoke:

"It can be heard by everyone what I have said: Better still the Bavarians than the French. Because the Bavarians are Germans like us, and when we stand against them, one brother stands against the other!"

The effect of those words was tremendous. Cries of rage rose, curved glasses flashed. A giant guy in a green jacket, the silver edged brass knuckles on the little finger of the clenched fist, jumped over the table and wanted to go at the speaker, foaming with rage. Prudent people intervened. Old Patscheider, panting with fury, spat his sputum, yellow from chewing tobacco, at the young man, who stood proud and free, his eyes gleaming with fever, his arms crossed over his chest. The sight of him moved Peter immensely and he felt strongly tempted to rush to the aid of the afflicted man.

But the host had already intervened. His voice drowned out the shouting and stamping of the enraged.

"Federspiel," he ordered, "you go now. Such talk does no good. Go home, and right now!"

The student nodded.

"I'll go," he called back. "The main thing is that it has been said. Some people will think about it, after all!"

Without further hesitation, he strode upright and haughtily toward the door.

"Go down to Pflederer!" Patscheider shouted after him, crowing. The brittle old voice rolled over into a fistula of intemperate anger.

"You will get shiny Bavarian pennies if you tell him anything!"

Completely calm, the reviled man turned his face toward the hall.

"Does anyone believe that about me?" he asked almost sadly.

No one gave any answer.

“Go now, Serafin!” said the innkeeper gently. Federspiel turned, shrugged once more, and went out, closing the door behind him. The people in the room seemed sorry for their outburst. The shouting died away, only the old man’s nagging voice continued to shrill for a while.

“He meant well!” said Peter to the man sitting next to him.

“That may be,” returned the latter, after a few sidelong glances, half aloud. “Only he has forgotten that the German brothers, as he calls the Bavarians, at this time imagine themselves nothing but the henchmen of Napoleon. We can’t help it. The game has already begun, and must be finished. But to you, Herr, I would like to advise you: Take good care of what you speak! You don’t know the Tyrolean language and you are a city lord. The peasant does not trust such people as you without further ado.”

Peter looked at his neighbor in amazement and looked into a pair of wise, honest eyes.

“You may be right,” he agreed. “And a peasant you are not, I suppose?”

The other smiled. “I carry myself no differently from my countrymen, and you may call me a peasant. Peasantry is a righteous Stand. If the peasant is up to something, you shouldn’t make him confused. And that is what Herr Federspiel has done. Of course, it’s sad when Germans fight Germans but I silently think that they will come together one day, even if we will not live to see it. After our short existence on this earth we must not measure the fate of a people at all. A people lives a long time and has time. - Once again, Herr Storck, hold back, don’t talk much and rather listen all the more to what others say. And so that you know: I am the chief marksman Josef Zangerl from Prutz. We will probably meet again one day. Now I have to leave, I still have a long way to go!”

He shook Peter’s hand vigorously and stood up. His example had an immediate effect. Numerous companions, who like him, had climbed up from the Inn valley, stood up. None would have Peter pay. The drinks had been free.

Gradually the parlor emptied completely. The last one to leave came out of a dark corner and slowly walked past Peter. He was frightened to the core. He had never seen anything uglier, more horrible than the face and figure of this apparition, the dark red, and spotty marksman’s jacket flopped around the scrawny torso, under fluttering pants trudged calf-less legs, around the lower part of which the blue stockings hung in folds, as if they

were pulled over sticks. In the pale face, eyes glowed deep in dark sockets, above parchment-thin lips that exposed the yellow teeth; in place of the nose was a pitted hole. Thin sticky curls hung from a yellow skull.

A shudder ran down Peter's spine as the abomination slid past him, baring its teeth. A draft of air drove in at the door, through which he disappeared, causing the lights to flicker.

"Who was that?" Peter turned to the innkeeper standing beside him.

"I didn't pay any attention to him," he said calmly. "There were quite a few there I didn't know."

He left, closing the front door.

Peter was left alone. There he sat in the middle of the strange little place that had been his uncle's homeland for so many years. This first day had brought many adventures, and instead of the boredom he had quietly feared during the journey, exciting and surprising experiences were piling up. Now he had stumbled into the midst of a secretly smoldering hearth of fire, from which the flames of unleashed fury would soon burst. For a moment he thought of Pfleederer, who had shown himself friendly to him, in some way, but at the same time it occurred to him that this would be tantamount to treason and a shameful breach of trust. In between, the tormented face of the possessed nun rose before him again.

He looked around the deserted guest room. An ibex head, artistically carved, with the magnificently curved heavy horns was an old work, it probably came from the time when the Emperor Maximilian, the last knight, hunted the noble mountain game here.

The eternity of nature came to his mind, the thought that Theuerdank [character of a 16th century verse novel identified with Maximilian]

had heard here, as now he himself heard, the distant murmur of the brook as a humming murmur, sank oppressively down upon him as well as the cheerful and colorful life of the Viennese city, the golden glow of the thousand candles of festive halls, the silken rustle of fragrant women's skirts, the sweet sobbing of violins and flutes in mirrored rooms. Here smelled of blood and hatred. Long-cold incense vapors of centuries gone by were in the air, rigid, unchanging loyalty, that clung to what had long since decayed was engraved in the souls, incorruptible tenacity, bound the hearts of these people to a ruler who knew nothing of their kind. It was touching to see the glow in the weary, furrowed faces when his name was mentioned, to feel the awe when the conversation touched on matters of faith. And now



these sober hard peasants wanted to stand up, to let their good blood flow for the man who wore the crown in Vienna, for the arrogant one, to whom men and nations were nothing but stones in a game of power.

The innkeeper entered and pulled the door shut behind him. "You have come at a wicked time, Herr Storck," he said.

He poured his and Peter's glass full from the tap, put new chips in the clamps on the wall, and sat down with his only guest.

"Tomorrow, then, I'll turn the Zeitlanghof over to you," he nodded. "Everything lies and stands as the Captain left it."

"When he comes back, he will thank you," Peter replied. "When...!"

"He will never come again." The innkeeper shook his head sorrowfully. "They have certainly killed him."

"Who?!" cried Peter.

"You might laugh at me."

"I really don't feel like laughing," Peter replied excitedly. "I also told the bailiff down below that my uncle might have been murdered. But he won't do anything. I, however, will not rest until I have..."

Christian Lerggetpohrer made a gesture with his hand.

"What does the bailiff know?"

"So you tell me what you know," Peter pressed the blond-bearded man.

"Me? My God, I don't know any more than the other people. And they just think that the old man was killed by the fire spirits."

"The fire spirits...?"

"That's what we call the poor souls who have to burn in the eternal fire for their sins. On two days in the year they are allowed out of their torment and allowed to cool their embers on the distant ice. Then, of course, they must go back again."

"Is that what you believe? Listen, Lerggetpohrer..."

"I am well aware that you city lords do not want to know about such things. But that is why it is so. The same fire spirits can be seen by everyone when their time comes, how they slowly and sadly descend into the depths, glowing over and over. Yes, Herr Storck, there is nothing to mock! They gather below the saddle between the Schellbock and the Black Hen, looking like little lights or flames, and disappear into the gorge.

And wherever someone gets in their way out of spite, they throw rocks down on him so that he loses his life."

"I can't believe it."

Was the man speaking seriously? Peter saw nothing else in the honest features of the Rose innkeeper.

“Not believe it? But how about when you see it with your own eyes?”

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

“It is not far to the equinox, when they will come to light. From the library in the Zeitlanghof you can see them quite well, and your uncle has often waited for the little lights on the mountain. When the day comes, I will remind you; so that you may see the glowing men descend.”

“That will be fine,” Peter relented. “But what have the fire spirits, as you call them, to do with my uncle?”

The innkeeper bowed his head fully to Peter, and said softly, as if he feared to be heard, “He has traced them, and they do not suffer that. - But for today enough talk about it and you will probably be tired. Besides, we will go to the Zeitlanghof tomorrow.”

“Is the house uninhabited?”

“Yes. The old man’s landlady has moved away.”

“Do you know anyone who would like to help me?” asked Peter.

The landlord scratched his hair. “I don’t know anyone. - But maybe Notburga would help out for a while. You will just have to talk to her yourself.”

“Can you do without her?”

“Well, well. I can now. I have the maid here and a young relative. In the summer, of course, I’ll need Notburga for work, too.”

“It’s a long time till then, so I’ll talk to her.”

When the tall girl put the light on the table in the parlor and fluffed the clean bed, Peter asked her if she would like to be his housekeeper for a while up on the Zeitlanghof.

“Why not?” she said, looking at him calmly with her clear eyes.

“That way I hope we will get along well.”

He grasped her hand with joy. “So it’s a deal?”

“It’s a deal. Good night!”

He stood alone. The tallow candle smoldered and threw a flickering light. And again the image stood before him that had not left him for a moment during the whole journey, the image of the wonderful girl, the slender Greek goddess, who, like an apparition from another world, had walked through the hazy drinking room of the Golden Eagle in Innsbruck and had spoken to the wild-haired peasant. He heaved a deep sigh of relief.

“How could I have left you, fair one?”

But as he stood gazing into the little yellow flame, the sleep of weariness was already settling on his eyelids. The brook rustled a lullaby; the fresh smell of stone pine came from the candle holder in the room.

He quickly undressed, struggled for a while with colorful and agitated visions stemming from the events of that strangely fulfilling day, and suddenly sank into the velvet abyss of deep sleep.

## SECTION FOUR

He woke up in the first morning light, fresh and fully rested. The sky shone blue in the small window square; the first reddish rays of the rising sun lay on snow-covered trees and roofs. But already the white blanket was melting. The entire night, the sound of drops had passed through his sleep like a distant, glassy tinkling.

He stepped up to the windows, pushed open the latch. A faint obstacle pressed against the sash he was about to open. It was a stick, split at the tip; a note was jammed into the wood. Carefully, he reached through the window crack and pulled the paper towards him. With a faint sound, the long stick fell into the snow outside.

‘But this message, or whatever it was, could not possibly be for him. In shaky large letters there was something written that was completely incomprehensible. He read, and read again, “*Chi ca va via divieite stue vagnir mazans.*” He tried in vain to make any sense out of this scribble. Was this meant for him? That was hardly possible. He had only just arrived. The only strange thing was the way this note had been brought to his window by means of the long stick. Perhaps a joke that someone wanted to make with the newly arrived stranger? In any case, not a matter of great importance. He took the note, folded it up and put it in his wallet. He would ask the innkeeper about it later.

The icy water in the basin made him fresh and cheerful, and with a great desire to eat, he turned downstairs comfortably to the steaming bread soup that Notburga put in front of him on the table. Soon Christian also appeared; ready to go with him to the Zeitlanghof.

Peter took out the piece of paper from his leather bag and told how he had come by it. The innkeeper looked at the document from all sides. He could not make sense of it.

“In the Engadine they speak such a confounded language,” he said, “Father Archangelus in the valley below could probably read it. I think someone made a mistake in the window, who wanted to make a joke. The boys write down all kinds of stupid things. Or maybe one of them lost the paper and another one put it on the stick as a joke. This certainly does not

apply to you. For who should write you a note here, when you have just come!”

In fact, it seemed superfluous to worry too much about this matter. Thoughtlessly, Peter put the incomprehensible scribbling back in his pocket and thought no more about it, even less so when the innkeeper urged him to take a look at the Zeitlanghof. In the morning light, Peter saw for the first time the small village with its poor but very clean farms, all whitewashed, carefully covered with shingles, on which heavy stones from the creek bed weighed, so that the wind would not carry away the crossbars and boards into the air. At the end of the village stood a tiny church or chapel with a grass-green pointed tower next to a wall-girdled cemetery. A semicircular, ancient charnel house rose near the church amid the crosses, under which the weary people of Sankt Marein rested forever from the heavy and hard work of peasant life.

Just opposite the inn, from a wide sooty doorway came with ring and sound bright hammer blows, a blue fire flickered and gold sparks leapt in the darkness of the interior. A red snake coiled on the anvil, curled, bent into horseshoe shape.

“Busy already, Gervas?” Christian shouted inside.

Rumbling, deep growls rang out, a shaggy head, bearded and with ruffled hair, stretched forward with white eyeballs in a blackened face. This was the man - by God, it was the man who had overturned the chair, whose eyes looked so hateful when Peter told the Innsbruck innkeeper the destination of his journey, the man with whom the beautiful girl had whispered so familiarly in the Golden Eagle. His inflamed sooty eyes did not look very friendly even now, and hostilely rejected any speech.

But as he walked on, Peter could not resist asking about him.

“Him? That’s the blacksmith, Gervas Fentor. A good one he’s not. Works hard, but doesn’t go to church.”

“I saw him in Innsbruck,” Peter continued. “And a young lady was with him.”

“A black haired, clean one?” the innkeeper winked. “Then it was the strange young Miss who lives in the smith’s parlor in the summer.”

“She comes here?” asked Peter, seized with hot joy.

“Of course she does. She’s always here in the summer!”

Happiness smiled upon him. What he had not even dreamed of came true. Was there any greater possibility of getting nearer to her than here in

the little mountain village, where even without any effort one had to meet at any moment, indeed, where the taciturn and hard working peasants were virtually dependant on each other?

Suddenly the wild and rugged area seemed to him great and sublime, a worthy background for the beauty of the girl. Snow-covered with white, in untouched glory, the mighty ones rose high above the forests into the blue March air.

“The Zeitlanghof!” said his guide, pointing to a red tiled roof among the fir tops.

“Yes, you don’t know the mountains by their names yet, Herr?”

He pointed with his hand.

“The one to the left of us, which looks as if a little man were standing on top, is called the Hockauf, the pointed one next to it is the Schellbock, then the Gupf over there, which looks so dark out of the snow, has the name: the Black Hen. The one with the sharp ridge is the Haberer, on which the most beautiful rhododendrons grow in summer. Behind it lies the Varrauntser valley. There, behind the Schellbock, the Fire Rider is looking down, and next to it the high one with the cut off head, which is the Urtoz, on which the pagan gods are said to have lived in the past. You can’t see The Wild Man and the Old Man from here, but they are standing next to the Urtoz. Behind them come the Swiss mountains. Serafin Federspiel, will climb with you on the Schellbock, if you ask him.”

These mountains were beautiful in their gigantic splendor, but the sight of them was also oppressive and depressing. It seemed to Peter, as if they weighed on the valley, on the houses and on the people. Peter’s gaze, accustomed to free expanses, felt confined here into an anxious circle, into a pitiless round area that could not be crossed...

They passed through a wooden gate, green with moss and falling apart, passed through a gloomy coniferous garden between a matted hedge of diseased yew trees and immediately stood before a gray gloomy building, from whose heavy plank door the green paint was peeling off.

“The Zeitlanghof!” Christian said, looking for the key.

Peter stopped as if a cold hand had touched his skin. The unfriendly house was decorated in a disgusting way. Next to the door, well kept, was a life-size figure painted on the stucco of the wall. It was of death in a puffy judge’s robe, and dark red, stained country servant garb. The right foot in a torn stocking, from which the bone looked out, was gruesomely ornamental,

as if keeping the beat for a dance. The boney fingers grippingly held a cross pipe to the thin lips, and instead of the nose gaped a black hole. Sunken, grayish looking extinguished eyes lay beneath the jauntily placed hat with tattered feathers. The sword looked rusty in the torn scabbard, and from the belt hung an ox tongue with a wide iron blade. And under the armed piper there were words in squiggled writing:

After my piping  
Everyone sleeps  
The last rest  
Also with you  
It will be the same.

Christian Lergetpohrer paid little attention to the often-seen image, rattled the key at his waistband until the portal opened with a groan, and entered the corridor ahead of him.

For the time being there was not much to see. A ground-level parlor, kitchen and pantry, a trapdoor to the cellar. Here the innkeeper stopped.

“By the old gentleman’s leave,” he said, pointing toward the floor, “there are down there, well hidden and kept, four great double blunderbusses and an Organ of the Dead inlaid with many barrels in a frame from Landeck Castle, in a safe place, besides gun powder and lead.”

“I’m not talking about that,” Peter rebuffed. “It may be as it will; I may have nothing to do with it either for good or ill.”

“That’s right,” said the innkeeper. “What lies there lies well.”

On the upper floor, where there was a musty smell, the first door resisted. Only after combined efforts did it open with a screech. The air in the long closed room was foul. The innkeeper pushed open the swollen, lead-framed windows.

A wide low bed stood in the room, supporting a sky on four twisted pillars, blue and painted with golden stars. Otherwise there was not much, a few chairs and a washing machine, a peasant’s cupboard decorated with tulips and colorful birds. The blue-green tiled stove stood half here, half in the other room, into which a small door led.

Another door led out to the solarium corridor or gazebo, which extended as a walkway around the entire house.

In the large adjoining room, the air was even heavier with the smell of old paper and dry herbs. This was the room had his uncle had most probably occupied since the two other rooms were almost empty, and the mantle crumbled from the damp walls, on which saltpeter bloomed delicately and white.

A large heavy desk stood there, bookcases covered with cobwebs. An armchair was next to the window and the door, which also led to the basement. A sweaty, gray-striped carpet lay on the tile floor. Chests stood there, guns hung on the wall; strange things were scattered everywhere, iridescent tear bottles of Roman glass, stone axes, crystal and ore samples, whole bundles of scrawny herbs, blown-out eggs of wild birds, a thousand things that a lifetime had gathered here.

“It’s all just as the Captain left it.”

The human voice echoed strangely in the large room.

“There is still the attic, in which, of course, there is nothing to be seen but useless junk. - So I give you the key and the house, Herr Peter Storck, and God bless your entrance!”

He made the sign of the cross on Peter’s forehead, who stood still, deeply moved. Before he turned to go, he strode toward the bookcase, rummaged around for a while and finally pulled out a moderately large cardboard box, in which something clanked and rattled.

“This, Herr Storck, I put away before the Bavarian commission came up. There are two hundred and sixty Austrian ducats in it, which they would have certainly taken with them. I think that in this way I have saved you a lot of trouble. - And now I will go and send Notburga so that she can keep the storeroom in good order. We’ll settle up some other time!”

Peter thanked him, self-conscious and uncertain. The possession of the considerable sum of money did not make him happy. He was glad that his uncle’s house treasure had not fallen into the hands of the Bavarian court, but on the other hand, the hoard of gold meant only embarrassment for him. For it seemed unthinkable to him to dispose of his uncle’s property before he was certain of the old man’s fate.

The uncanny feeling that creeps over everyone who grasps a dead man’s beloved and barely abandoned possessions with his hands set in immediately when the footsteps of the host had faded away. Peter walked haphazardly around the spacious chamber, pulling a book off of the shelves here and there and leafed through mildew-stained pages. In a window



alcove, he discovered a small, finely painted portrait of a woman. But the face, framed by black curls, was cruelly mutilated. It had obviously been cut with a blade, and the gaping cuts made the expression of the delicately painted face unrecognizable. On the lower edge of the gold frame there was an inscription in ink letters:

*"In rosa vermis"* - "In the rose lurks the worm."

No doubt, - it was the picture of that actress for whose sake the officer on horseback had fallen into misery and loneliness. And in spite of the furious rage, which had been aroused by this little picture, the deceived man had not possessed the strength to completely renounce the memory. Long and wistfully, Peter looked away from the portrait to the snow-covered mountains and thought of how often his uncle's gaze had taken the same path, from the face, which might have remained recognizable to him despite the cuts, to the guardians in implacable rigidity, which enthroned there unmoved over forests, meadows, rock falls, a miserable village and the people in it, high above the organ-like roar of the brook.

The house door opened, and footsteps sounded in the hall. Soon Peter and Notburga found themselves entangled in setting things to order and work of all kinds and released from sensitive thought.

The next morning he was back at the inn and remembered the old man who had crossed his path in such a strange way. He asked Christian, but he knew nothing of a man of such appearance. A peasant, who was listening to the conversation, interjected that he thought he had seen him from afar. It could be the foreign pitch thief who sheltered in the Damned Forest with old Rangger Blasi. A third person interrupted. He had also seen him, but also only from afar. The blacksmith, however, knew him well, and he was also staying with the blacksmith's brother, the charcoal burner Romanus. He had not been there long, he was called the wanderer, because he can be seen soon here, soon there; but he does not approach anyone. A fool and quite shy. There would be several such oddballs in the mountains. They would continue to do no one any harm.

"In three days the pitch will come, so the people from the valley say," the first diverted the conversation to more important things. "Father Archangelus is supposed to have said that once the snow is gone, you'll hear the drums thumping and the pipes screaming."

"For God's sake, men!" cried Christian, clenching his strong fist. "Then I wouldn't like to be a Bavarian for once."

“You may be right,” said the other, a white Robler feather nodding on his pointed mountain hat. “But things are going to be hard, starting now.”

“Does it have to be?” gasped Peter. He thought of the soldiers he had seen, trusting and peaceable, of the fat bailiff who smoked his pipe in the post office down in the valley below.

“Yes, it must be. It must happen once,” the peasant with the cock’s feather cried out angrily. “Such gentlemen know nothing much of what happens to us peasant people. Down there in the valley, they pushed up the skirts of two young girls in front of everyone and whipped their naked buttocks bloody, the hellhounds, because the girls rung out closing time, as it is the custom with us since ever and ever. One of them plunged into the water out of shame. And two old women have seen and want to swear that the Holy Mother in the blue cloak has risen from heaven, has pulled her out of the river by her little hands and taken her into the heavenly kingdom.”

“Have you heard, Josele?” said one of them after a pause. “Our judge Stöckl in Landeck, they want to bite him out now, too. He thinks too much of the Peasants, they say.”

“And also the priest Bäracher, who has remained faithful to the bishop of Chur?” replied Christian vehemently.

“All that are lords, slay!” came a rough and low voice from the door. The blacksmith Fentor stood there, wild and black.

“Are you doing so badly again, Gervas?”

“Give me some brandy, Rose Innkeeper!” he hissed.

With him, who threw his glass down his gullet and went right back to work, an ancient little man had scurried into the parlor. The shiny black armor of his jacket stood in glaring contrast to his snow-white hair and stubble beard. His old jacket, covered with a thousand patches, had almost disappeared under a glittering crust of pitch. A pervasive smell of larch oil emanated from it, and with every movement the cracked pitch plates of its surface clinked softly.

He came very close to Peter and asked, barely comprehensible, if the gentleman would give him permission to scratch the trees in his strip of forest belonging to the Zeitlanghof and to collect pitch.

“No way!” shouted Christian between them, “he’ll kill your forest, the tree-flayer!”

The tiny man turned crimson and danced with rage like a little devil, muttering poisonous imprecations. But then he bowed down humbly before

Peter and began to beg hastily. It was only black pines, he said, and everyone knew that this tree endured the pitch tapping in Tröglein without harm. This is his, Rangger Blasi's, bread and another trade he does not understand, and has also learned nothing else from childhood. So Peter took pity on him despite the landlord, who wanted to have his fun, and allowed the tapping and scraping until further notice.

"I'll let the veins do their work, just like a bather," the pitch collector chuckled. "Do no tree serious harm, because any tree is dearer to me than a man."

"That's why I believe you!" cried Christian, laughing. "You get on well with the trees and think to yourself, 'I'll hang on one of you one day!'"

Resounding laughter rewarded the joke. The old man turned his piercing little eyes on the laughing host and said with strange emphasis, "Me? Me? Me? And you're already wearing the rope around your neck, Rose Innkeeper."

"What?" cried Lergetpohrer, rising slowly. "Do you want to fly out over the forge roof, you old rascal?"

"It's written on your face, think of me when you run out of air!"....

With a repulsive chuckle, he swept from the room even before the innkeeper's hand could reach for him.

The old man's words had created an uneasy mood. Such old people saw and knew more than others, and Christian stroked his hand over his neck as if he really felt the rope that was to cut off his life. All the more eagerly they plunged into conversations that dealt with the prospects of the next period, of which everyone was secretly afraid in his soul. Peter heard for the first time the name of the Austrian general, Chasteler, pronounced in guttural, on whom the hopes of the country seemed to rest as much as on a Passeir horse dealer and innkeeper who worked in secret with Teimer and Kolb to bring the Tyrolean's under arms.

"Kolb is quite a fool!" Josele was indignant. "Don't believe him, people. He doesn't know what he's talking and doing. I know him through and through, the buffoon. You'd better follow Zangerl from Prutz; he's an experienced man who understands the business!"

"Kolb is no fool at all," cried the man with the pointed mountain hat, "he knows how to talk better than Andrä Hofer, whom they only follow because he's grown a big beard and knows how to shit on people from the cattle trade."

“So wait until Teimer comes,” said Voglsanger, who had been silent until now. “And in the meantime, stick to Zangerl. Zangerl is our Commander and he has what it takes.”

Excitedly, one loungeur waved his hands in the air. “The black smith was right. There are too many gentlemen in the game. Hui, peasant, you still don’t know how much you can trust the gentlemen do you?”

The one with the pointed mountain hat poked him in the side and pointed at Peter with the tip of his pipe:

“Everything doesn’t have to be talked about right now,” he said.

Peter felt himself blushing, got up and went out.

“Do you want to drive away my best guests?” he heard Christian angrily, “you with your one glass of brandy...”

Disgruntled, Peter went up the path. He was unaccustomed to such talk from the mouths of peasants. In Lower Austria they were smoother and less bold, when a Lord sat at their table.

The snow melted quickly, falling in wet clumps from trees and roofs. It blew lukewarm from the south and the birds sang full of spring joy. A newly emerged day brook gurgled along the way.

He now almost had to laugh at his quick annoyance. The whole thing seemed to him suddenly not very serious. For so long, these peasants had been clenching their fists in their sacks, threatening to riot and be beaten to death, and yet they took off their hats whenever a Bavarian official strolled past. Except for small riots at the recruit draft, nothing had happened. This time, too, it would remain with words. What could these poor mountain men with rusty double barrel blunderbusses, scythes, grisly hatchets, a few old muzzle loaders and gun powder do against the drilled army of the Bavarian king, who stood in the immense shadow of the victorious Napoleon? There was probably a ferment in the country, but what one saw was impotent discontent and Inn Valley conspiracy.

Worse than the danger of an uprising seemed to him the increasing poverty of the Upper Inn Valley, the closure of the large factory in Imst and the unemployed heaps that wandered begging in the countryside.

## SECTION FIVE

When he was back in the library, he set about examining the desk. Perhaps there was something to be found here that revealed the secret life of his uncle. Even Lergetpohrer did not really know what the old man had been doing all day long. He had often been in the mountains, but most of the time he had spent in his lonely room and had not gone out much among the people. The innkeeper said that he had performed many quiet charitable deeds, but mostly it had been the housewives who had appeared on his behalf, always with the instruction that the Lord should be spared from expressions of gratitude, for this was repugnant to him.

Peter opened all the drawers of the spacious desk. They were all empty, only in one of the lowest compartments lay something. He pulled out a book and a sheet of paper and looked at the find more closely. The book was bound in pigskin, heavily worn and closed with brass clasps. A dusty single sheet was written in bright ink and obviously torn from a notebook. Only with difficulty could he decipher the old-fashioned squiggly writing:

*“So there are wandering souls of the dead lurking around everywhere, searching for new houses they can slip into and possess. Yes, you must faithfully keep watch and not allow such guests to enter in any way and protect yourself. There are still those who can let the soul go out on its own and the body remains behind powerless. Thus, the foreign lurking soul can slip into such an abandoned body and take possession in much the same way as for example the fox crawls into the badger’s den when the badger is not home. From then on, that body is more or less their own and the proper soul is forced to remain outside and doesn’t understand why. I myself have known a basket maker’s son in Basel, who fell asleep as an honest boy (as the ignorant people think) and after being awakened he turned out to be a wicked and devilish rogue, wilder than a Turk, more godless than a Moor, and in just a few years he was granted a wedding with the rope maker’s daughter. And why? Because he was one who could let his soul go out from him. It is quite alarming, as this example shows. Secondly, I know of a Milanese councilor by the name of Scotto, who...”*

Shaking his head, Peter put the paper aside. Judging from the bluish paper, it came from a very old notebook, was browned and frayed at the edges. He opened the book and read the ornate title page.

*Treasury*

*Rare and new curiosities*

*In the most marvelous wonders of nature and art / Therein all kinds of strange and immense secrets / proven arts / sciences / and pieces of art / to be found.*

*With the Grace of the Electorate of Saxony. Not to be reprinted.*

*Hamburg at Gottfried Schultzen's expense 1689.*

Curious by the pompous title, Peter leafed through the thick volume and discovered a plethora of the most outlandish instructions and advice. There were precise instructions on how to make artificial marble, details on the best days for bloodletting and purging, remedies for the flying gout, cooking instructions, secrets of the goldsmith's art and much more. Had his uncle been caught up in such superstitious and playful ideas? This seemed entirely possible to him, based on the surviving descriptions of the missing man's way of life, when he saw the lonely and joyless life of the aging man. In this gloomy house, in the walls of which trickled and knocked, many a thing might thrive that did not dare to come out in the busy restlessness of the city. In one of the chests there were glass flasks, tubes and bottles, as well as all kinds of powders and sealed bladders with liquids that indicated experiments in the art of separation.

The discovery saddened him and clouded the high image he had had of his uncle. The faithfully preserved images of youthful imagination resisted the thought that the spirit of the revered man could have been sick and confused.

How gloriously he had pictured the handsome and proud cavalry officer in the splendor of his white tunic, the incident with the pitiful Frenchman, who flew down the stairs like a crumpled bundle of rags, while the faithless beauty pleaded tremulously for mercy and the broadsword of the angry man clinked against the spurs of the wildly stamping foot. Now this proud painting was to give way to the image of an old, coughing man

that anxiously poured liquids into glass tubes and searchingly leafed through smoky books. Undeterred, he hurled the book back into the drawer. No, that was not possible! His uncle, the proud Martin Storck, who called the almighty emperor a miserable tyrant, was not that!

There was thunder in the mountains. On the patch of grass in front of his house, yellow cowslips and snowbells came out of the ground. A rooster crowed. Notburga stood outside, strong and beautiful in her freshness, scattering feed to the chickens and surrounded by small, begging birds. Since she was there, there had been poultry in the yard, and a big stray cat stroked coaxingly around her flowing apron. The torrent raged with joy, and the fields steamed.

As she went into the house, he descended into the kitchen. She was already standing by the stove, glowing red. Her bare firm arms gleamed, sparks of light passed through her golden hair. The black bodice cracked when she stirred, and the breast cloth trembled with every breath.

She looked at him kindly. He stepped up to her. The nearness of her warm body made his young, unspent blood restless. Involuntarily he touched her bare arm.

Was she blushing? Her lips remained half open, something like helplessness entered her face, and embarrassed she busied herself at the stove.

“You mother...” he thought, not knowing where the word came to him. “Do you like it here, Notburga?” he asked aloud.

She turned dark red, really, and nodded. The cat came, purring around her. She reached for the little animal, which nestled comfortably in her arm, and stroked the rustling fur.

“Is the cat yours, or was she at the house?”

“I brought her up with me,” she answered, “I raised her with a bottle. So she is my little child.”

He cajoled the kitten, who playfully beat at his hand with soft paws.

“The master must have hands like wax...” the girl suddenly said in a strangely low voice. “Children also have such delicate hands...”

He grabbed her by the shoulders, looking heatedly into her clear blue eyes.

“You love children...?” She closed her eyes. A soft sound came from her mouth, almost like a strangled cry. Her hard breast pressed against his arm.

“No!” he said to himself.

Slowly he walked out. Yes, it was his blood that foamed in the spring; It was his youth and the many days without women. He thought of a Würzburg hacker’s daughter who had climbed up to his student digs once and then no more. She was getting married soon. She and Frau Genoveva Schnäbele, who had been everything in his life.

Restless, he went out of the house, watched the people toiling. They took advantage of the first beautiful day and carried earth in baskets to the fields on the hillside, patiently building up what the waterfalls had washed away. In the ermine coat of the heights it ate around itself like black burn spots, and they became larger hourly.

There came one who seemed familiar to him. A slender young man, his heavy carbine slung over his shoulder, strode down the path with a springy gait. A wheel of chamois whiskers and the double crescent of a gamecock adorned the broad yellow-green hat. He stopped and saluted.

“Herr Federspiel?” asked Peter.

“Yes, the same. We saw each other down there, at the Rose Inn, right? How they kicked me out...” -

“You talked bravely,” said Peter kindly. “Just - a little at the wrong moment.”

The hunter leaned on his hatchet and fixed the gaze of his beautiful bright eyes on Peter.

“Do you think so? I think to myself, one must confess what is serious and sacred to one. Even if one has to suffer for it.”

“I would like to talk with you more often,” Peter assured him. “May I come with you sometime when you go up again?”

“Whenever you like,” smiled the other. “I know the way and the footbridge, and to go alone is not advisable for the uninformed.”

He waved his hand in a friendly manner and went on. For a long time Peter watched him go, not without sadness. His trained eye had recognized that the young man was more seriously ill than he had first thought. The sunken neck, the small rusts on the cheekbones, the peculiar shining look and the dry cough, that soon afflicted the man as he walked along, told him enough.

After the coarse and simple lunch that Notburga had served him, he could no longer stand the confines of the room and went on his own up the mountain path.



The slippery path soon led into an old forest. Black tracks in the wet earth betrayed the path taken by the charcoal burners. Somewhere around here must be the charcoal yard where the blacksmith's brother lived. A wayside shrine with smudged painting leaned crookedly against the path. It smelled resinous, a freshly sprung up breeze rustled in the treetops and cold drops fell from the branches on which they had hung.

After a while the stand became sparser, the cart path was no longer so steep, and at last it opened out almost level into a clearing. The pungent smell of burning and the pickling scent of the juices running off the charring wood made themselves felt despite the wind that blew toward the charcoal yard.

Two round piles, with curling thin smoke, stood side by side, surrounded by circular ditches. A giant in leather pants, whose sooty shirt was open and the shaggy chest was visible, stomped around the first pile and worked with the huge poker. His face disappeared in a wilderness of hair and beard. The terrible muscles of his arms sprang forth in thick lumps. The second charcoal fire was operated by a stout, dark-haired boy, who sang at the top of his lungs. In the open space stood a wretched, warped hut, covered with bark. Not far from it knelt a barely matured, half-naked girl, white-skinned with chestnut-brown hair kneading dough with thin arms, in a hollow. Not far from her, crouched on a tree stump, was a strong, dark-skinned woman, obviously the mother of the charcoal-burner's brood, and in front of her, devoid of any covering, stood a little girl of about four years, holding with both hands one of the enormous, heavily hanging down breasts and drinking the warm milk in deep gulps.

This woman saw the stranger first, pushed the child away from her so that it rolled onto the lawn, and gave a shrill, short cry. Immediately the huge one at the pile turned and caught sight of Peter. His inflamed eyes stared angrily, the hair above his low brow bristled into a comb and with an angry roar and slurring, and he swung the terrible poker against the newcomer.

Peter saw, not without horror, how the monster approached him with a swaying and heavy gait. But he bravely stood still and looked at the half savage. This did not remain without effect, for the bearded one, after some grunting, lowered the heavy weapon and stood undecided, his eyes seeking council from the female. Judging by the senseless sounds he emitted, he was denied the gift of speech.

Laughing, the woman shouted a few words incomprehensible to Peter, and the boy grabbed him by his sooty shirt sleeve and pulled him back toward the pile. Calmed down, the charcoal burner continued his walk around the pile, inside of which it was glowing, taking care that nowhere did the bright flame strike into the hill.

The boy hurried to his mother and stopped there. She covered her breast in the dirty cloth and took the screaming child, whom she had just pushed away, on her lap. The young girl at the wooden trough wiped her doughy fingers in the grass and pulled the tattered little shirt over her white body.

Peter searched in his pockets, found some silver money and went with it to the mother. She grinned, let the coins ring in the hollow of her hand, and then reached for his arm, pointing to the hut with a questioning look. He did not understand at once and looked at her affectedly as she pointed to the childish girl and from him to the dark room from which came a smell like that of an animal cage. When the young man still gave no sign, a joyful amazement passed over her wide, freckled face.

“Me?” she said and stood up.

Gripped by disgust, Peter took flight. Laughter came behind him. But when he was under the trees that bordered the woodland meadow, the little girl bounded to his side and laughingly showed her white teeth.

“Would you rather do it in the wood with me?” she asked, looking at him willingly.

He shook his head, unable to speak. There she stood with him, barely reaching his chest.

Her bare legs peeked out white from under her short red gown. Her face was pretty and still unfinished, her amber eyes completely knowing. Pointed little breasts lifted her shirt.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“I’m Sylvana,” she answered. “Don’t you like me?”

“How old are you, Sylvana?”

She held up all ten fingers, then closed her hands and spread out five more fingers.

“That much!” she laughed at him. But as he was about to enter the path that led up the mountain, she was in front of him in one leap, blocking his path. There was something like fear in her face.

“You must turn back, handsome!” she cajoled like a cat. “Mustn’t go any further!”

He had to laugh involuntarily at her seriousness and raised forefinger. In sudden good humor he reached into her brown mop of hair, bent her head slightly back and said, “And why?”

But there was nothing in her face that looked like jest.

“Don’t go today, you!” she said again. “They’ll kill you up there! Go some other time! Today they won’t allow it...!”

“Who?” he laughed, shaking her a little.

“The fiery ones” - she hissed and looked around shyly.

Ah, she probably also believed in the poor souls, who, after cooling in the ice of the blue-green distance, flared up and had to return for more torment.

“The fire spirits?” he asked.

She nodded vigorously and tugged him downward by the jacket.

“Well, then I will follow you, Sylvana,” he relented. “But sometime you will show me your spirits.”

She looked at him as if she wanted to say something, but slapped the flat of her hand over her mouth and pattered along beside him.

“Why don’t you like me?” she inquired.

Peter was embarrassed all over again. The way she offered herself repelled him. He remained standing.

“Go now, Sylvana,” he said.

“Give me another gift!” she grinned mischievously. “You have so much money!”

He handed her quite a few more coins. She gave a jubilant cry and ran skipping back the way she came.

## SECTION SIX

As Peter reached the Zeitlanghof, he found the brother with Notburga.

“Thank God,” said Christian and got up from the chair. “I have endured deathly fears. You went up the mountain?”

“Yes, but the charcoal burner’s daughter made me turn back!”

“Then this sinful person did a good thing for once,” nodded Lergetpohrer. “Do you not know what day this is? On this day the Captain disappeared forever in the mountain, and now you have gone the same way.”

“Holy God!” said Notburga and made a sign of the cross.

Belated fear gleamed in her eyes.

“But my uncle died last autumn...” began Peter.

“Autumn or not,” the innkeeper stepped close to Peter. “Equinox is today just as it was then. Didn’t I tell you that only two days in the year the fiery ones go around?”

“I did not think of the day,” Peter objected. “But if I had been aware of it, I would not have turned back, but would have gone up to the gorge and waited there for the spirits.”

“You have been saved from that.” The man’s words sounded solemn. “Before the night was over, you would have had to give up your life.”

“And yet, Christian Lergetpohrer, whatever you say, I will find out what has happened to my poor uncle. And now that I am reminded, of what day it is, I will go up without delay.”

Notburga cried out and clasped her hands in supplication.

But the broad-shouldered peasant did not give way, and calmly stopped him as he was going out of the kitchen.

“As long as I live, Herr Storck will not go,” he said calmly.

“What?!” cried Peter in rising anger. “By what right do you allow yourself...?”

“It is my Christian duty,” the innkeeper calmly replied. “Enough misfortune has happened with such foolishness. But you shall see the spirits, and that today!”

“See? Where?!”

“From the library, as I have told you before. And even if you wanted to go out to the gorge - now it’s too late.”

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

“Very well. So I will at least see them from afar this time. But be careful, they won’t show themselves when I’m there. Notburga shall keep us company...”

“Not for the Emperor’s golden crown!” cried the girl, frightened. “I don’t like to see them, the infernal spirits.”

And in spite of Peter’s coaxing, she persisted in her refusal.

Peter climbed the stairs slowly, the massive step of Christian behind him. Wasn’t the whole thing a half-feral, half-ridiculous dream? Dusk began, and in the corners of the library gray clumps were forming. The outline of the saddle stood out sharp and gloomy between the Shellbock and the Black Hen against the pale blue spring sky, where the first silver star twinkled.

Silently, the master of Zeitlang manor picked up a telescope he had recently discovered and opened wide the window door to the gazebo. Down in the village another stable door creaked, a little dog yelped. Soon it became quiet. They went to bed early in Sankt Marein.

They both sat at the open door next to the desk. Steel, stone, tinder, and sulfur threads lay next to the bare brass lamp, but Christian did not want the light to be turned on. The glass eyes of a stuffed owl blinked faintly, the wind blowing in through the open door rustled in old papers. Blackbirds shrilled up, disturbed by a cat, and fell silent.

“Christian,” Peter took the floor after a while, “I consider you a wise and thoughtful person. How can you seriously believe that ghosts...”

The innkeeper raised his hand.

“Be patient, Herr Storck, until the matter comes up. You would easily do me an injustice otherwise. Wait until you have seen for yourselves what kind of a creature it is.”

Peter Storck began to grow bored with the lurking. He got up and paced back and forth in the room. There now sat a man, gifted with the senses, who presumed to show him fiery ghosts in the flesh. As if one did not know what the imagination as well as the penchant for the supernatural knew what to make out of a blue-glowing musty stick. What darkness lay on the souls of these mountain peasants! It was certainly useless to try to talk them out of something in which they believed with peasant obduracy

and stubbornness, everywhere the people had the urge to make the forces of nature figurative, to create goblins, dwarfs, mountain spirits, water nymphs and furious armies. So here they had the fiery spirits, the burning souls of the damned. Quite unexpectedly, he was overcome with homesickness for the small circle of friends in Vienna, who probably did not even know where Peter had gone, for conversations with educated people whose thought processes were free of such stuff and garbage. Now, of course, it was probably best to try one's patience, to wait undoubtedly in vain, and not to be too much at odds with people's superstitions.

"The first one is already there," said Christian at that moment. He sat immobile, with his hands on his knees.

A sudden commotion brought the word after all.

"Where?!" shouted Peter.

The seated man's hand rose and pointed straight ahead.

"Just below the saddle. They are already coming here, the poor souls. Now I already see three, - no, there are four already!"

With a peculiar shudder, which he tried in vain to ward off, Peter Storck now quite clearly recognized four, five yellow-red restless dots, which slowly hovered below the saddle of the gorge. Hastily and unsteadily, he pulled the telescope open, leaned it sideways against the doorframe, and looked in. His hands trembled.

"There are already several," said the deep voice beside him.

Now he had caught one of the flickers of light. But even in the glass there was not much more to see than with the naked eye. They were flames, little fires that rose up and hovered after each other, united in groups and dispersed again. Twenty, thirty, even more could be counted. They appeared, flickered restlessly, disappeared temporarily and reappeared further down, climbing down to the gorge. On the black silhouette of the mountain, one could clearly see the glow. One saw it. There was no denying it. They were there, the fire spirits, walking as people walk down a slope; they joined together and moved apart again. Peter put the telescope away. His eye hurt from straining to look. Even without a glass, everything was clearly recognizable, and as much as the mind resisted, it was wonderful and horrible at the same time.

"Do you believe me now?" asked the innkeeper, describing a circle against the mountain with his hand.

"Lights or flames I see..." admitted Peter hesitantly.

“Those are the poor souls. God grant them eternal rest!”

A thought flashed through Peter’s mind. “But Christian! I’ve got it! They are smugglers!” he cried, relieved, “Smugglers who come from Switzerland.”

The innkeeper made a negative movement. “Herr Storck, you must think us quite stupid here. Or rather, you don’t know the mountains. Otherwise you would not talk like that. For anyone who knows the mountains knows that from the Varrauntser Valley, from the Swiss side, one can’t force the Schellbock and the Black Hen as well as the saddle cannot be forced in the meantime. There are towering walls through which no possible climb leads...”

“Many things are possible for good climbers at great profit. Is what I mean,” Peter resisted.

“If you’ve once been up there, you won’t talk like that again.” The innkeeper laughed softly. “And as for the double-crossers, of whom there are enough in the valleys round about, they have only one passable path, and it is not easy to walk: Beside the Haberer through the Nassen Wall and over the Glui.”

“That may be all,” Peter replied. “But how is it that not one of you has summoned up the courage to go after the things?”

“That’s where the last of the spirits descend into the gorge,” cried Lergetpohrer, following the light with a pointing finger, which soon disappeared. “No courage? That we Tyrolean’s do not lack it, as you will certainly see! Just as you have wanted to fathom it, so have others. One lived here, wrote about it himself, Romedius Schabseisen, but because of his addiction to the card game Allbot was called only Laubober. This same Laubober has managed many things. For a liter of wine he went to the graveyard on St. Andrew’s Eve, took a rotten skull from the charnel house and threw it on the table among the boys, so that they were all dewy-eyed with fear and horror. In Anno ninety-three he shot a young bear on this same glacier and, when the old woman came out from behind a rock with a ghastly roar and took him on, he fought back bravely with the sticking knife and prevailed. Because of the incident with the skull he had to growl for six weeks in the slaughterhouse at Landeck, but the bear cost him the left eye and two crushed ribs along with many deep scratches, so that he lay near death. I myself watched later once, how he, as a one-eyed man, fetched a stray sheep for Hornauss from out of the Red Wall, that is, I wanted to

watch. But I had to turn my gaze away, because the climbing and hanging in the rock was terrible. And this same Laubober swore that he wanted to play on the panpipe while the fire spirits danced. He bet a barrel of red Terlaner with the boys. Today it's just ten years since he went up there.

'Do you have your panpipe with you?' the boys shouted.

'Well, well,' he said.

So he took the panpipe and a musket with a consecrated bullet in it and went up. Everyone was looking up the mountain and wondering what was going to happen. When the first fire spirits appeared, in the still air one could hear the melody very fine and bright. It sang 'The Brown Chamois Are Dear To Me,' but only briefly. Then everything was quiet. And one said:

'There was a scream . . . But no one heard anything except him.'

The innkeeper paused for a moment, got up, went to the window and said, "Let's close it. The air is coming in cold."

He pushed the latch forward and to Peter it seemed as if the man feared something else might come in besides the night air.

"What was it about the chamois leaf ruff?"

"In the morning, in the first gray they went up, and after a long search they found the poor fellow down in the gorge. He was lying in the water, half dead with broken limbs. The blood had run out of his mouth."

"So he was dead?"

"Not right away. He was still able to speak a few words. This much was understood, that he saw two devils, ran away from them, and they after him. They rushed him over the cliff wall, so that he had to kill himself miserably. The rifle and the pipe were found at the top. He must have thrown them away as the infernals came."

"And further?"

"There's not much further. It was quickly over with him, could not tell much more. His body was like a sack of bones, said those who carried him down."

"And he still said that they were devils?" asked Peter incredulously.

"That's what he said. Two devils. And since that time no one has gone up, except the Captain. And he hasn't been able to tell anything at all."

"But not found, Christian, not found by anyone," Peter interjected excitedly. "And that's why..."



“The stream may have carried his body far down. It was wild water then. - But I must go home. So I wish you a restful night, Herr Storck, and let the poor souls be content.”

He stood up and reached for his hat.

“Once again, I will get to the bottom of this,” Peter said firmly. “I must and I will find out what has happened to my uncle.”

Christian shrugged and walked slowly and carefully down the unlit stairs. Peter heard him exchange a few more words with his sister. Then the heavy door at the bottom fell into the lock.

Hastily, to escape the sinking darkness, Peter struck fire and lit the sizzling blue sulphur wick of the oil lamp.

The quiet light spread pleasantly through the room. But the new, most miserable experience continued to have an effect, and that vague uneasiness of nocturnal loneliness that afflicts so many people also overcame Peter. Again and again he saw the wandering lights before him. A death clock was ticking somewhere in the room. He knew well that a small wood beetle produced this faint tapping sound by making short probing strokes with its armored head, but chills still ran over him. The dull roar of the brook and the wind organ in the trees could not drown out this faint warning sound. It smelled of transience in this chamber, the dead birds, filled with oakum, forced by bent wires into deceptive shapes of life, the dusty crystals, the scrawny crumbling plants, - something evil seemed to be lurking all around as if seeking something.

He walked around the room, picked up a green box that had been sitting unnoticed on the desk. Brown globules were in it. He smelled and rubbed them, held one up to the heat of the lamp. A stunning scent emanated from the pill: Laudanum. Perhaps his uncle had needed painkillers. May the box remain where it was. A volume of the works of the great Paracelsus stung his eyes. He opened it at random and read the sentence:

“We are glad to be born a German man!”

He remembered Federspiel and how good it would be to have someone there now, whose presence would make possible a relieving exchange of thoughts. And at last he landed in the sun kissed, comfortable leather chair in front of the desk.

Yes, he sat here lonely, not unlike the way his uncle, aged in solitude, had sat here. His life seemed to him misguided from the very beginning.

His first experience with women, his seduction by the sensual widow from Augsburg, had robbed him of his mother. Since that ugly morning with her, he had never been close to his mother again. who until then had meant everything in his life, which his strict and cold father had never been able to enrich with warmer feelings of affection. Thus a chill had passed through his youthful years, which had only given way in Würzburg, after the Franconians had accepted him into their covenant of friendship. His only attempt to win the love of a woman had fizzled out in the one-day experience with the coarse daughter of a hawker.

He had to leave his friends; in Vienna, however, he got into a polished circle of well-mannered young people, in which he liked it. But something was missing, something he longed for. Surely, with a secretly sobbing soul, he was still looking for the mother of old, who had become a stranger and had coldly escaped into the realm of shadows.

Perhaps, perhaps the beautiful girl, from whose dark eyes a spark had leapt into his heart, came to this place. Had not Christian said that? Deeply sheltered and faithfully preserved, her pure features had remained in his memory, and as often as the red-cheeked mocking face of Frau Genoveva appeared, the sweet, melancholy face of the stranger remained victorious, not allowing itself to be mixed with the smile of the woman who had told him to unlace her shoes to test his fresh manhood and rob his firstlings.

He heaved a deep sigh of relief, poor by the feeling of being far older and more mature than his years deserved. No, this thinking and brooding was good for nothing. And greedy for distraction, he pulled open the drawer in which lay the strange old book.

He opened it and read it. The thought did not leave him that perhaps some enlightenment lay hidden in the old print, and he was strengthened in this suspicion when he noticed how the first few lines of the preface, relatable in themselves, were moreover distinguished by a pale red line in the margin.

Almost auspicious, in fact, appeared the highlighted lines.

“Great Minded Reader!

Let it not be thought that the title of this book is greater than that which it promises and indicates.”

Here was the end of the red line. What came next and extolled the virtues of the book was no longer marked. He eagerly turned the pages further and found in the thick and varied volume, among the countless, half childish, half strange details of various feats and preparations of all sorts of things, the thin red stripe of the marker in the margin eight times. Immediately he set to work, took a few sheets of paper and wrote down the marked passages out of the book, as completely absurd the compilation looked.

To make one awake or asleep.

One must subtly cut off the head of a living toad alive and in one blow / and let this head dry / in such a way / that one eye is closed / and the other remains open/ this one, which is open/ makes one awake/ but the other/ which is closed/ makes one asleep/ if one carries it with him.

To soften glass.

Take goat's blood/ plantain juice and very strong wine vinegar and boil the glass with it.

*So that the meat cannot be brought out of the pot.*

When it boils/ throw in green iron herb.

*To make the live crabs red.*

They must be coated with very strong brandy/ and then mixed with cooked crabs on a plate/ that will give an artistic look.

His eyes began to hurt from the unaccustomed work of transcribing. He was close to giving up the work. The lamp hummed a lullaby, the hissing and murmuring from outside fell asleep. He took one of his uncle's silver-studded elm pipes that hung on the wall, stuffed it and lit the tobacco. It was quite comfortable that way. Thinking, he looked at the dark window, then suddenly leaned back, forcing his gaze to greater sharpness. For a moment he thought he saw an unmoving, evil face, badly illuminated, on the pane, the face of the old man whom they called the wanderer and yet whom no one seemed to know. It had been only a sensory illusion, as it happens with people, but he got up hastily and drew the curtains. Then, in defiance of the unknown forces of the mountains and himself, he determined to finish the

work and resumed writing, unconcerned that the poorly cut quill ran reluctantly and scratchily over the rough paper.

*To make much cream on the milk.*

Take a red snail/ and hang it on a thread in the middle of the vessel/ where the milk is inside/ and everything above the snail/ will become cream.

*Turn silver into gold.*

Take arsenic trisulphide and vitriol/ each as much as you like/ and let them flow together to form a powder/ which, when carried on silver in the river / gives good gold.

*Renew old pearls.*

Let them bake with bread in the oven / so they become clean and beautiful again.

*A good trick.*

Take three quarters of an ounce of sulphur/ 6 liters of lime/ 10 liters of ammonium chloride/ 4 liters of raw vitriol/ mix together/ and distill it through a glass retort/ then heat 22 liters of red oil / in this oil put laminated silver for a month / let it stand until it is eaten to lime / then reduce it to gold.

*For freckles.*

Take two dozen fresh eggs / let them harden in hot ashes / mix them with half a pound of subtly powdered white lead / then squeeze it under the press and distill the squeezed moisture into *Balneo Mariae*.

Despite all the searching, no more red lines were found in the book. He looked through the described sheets and then threw them on the table with quiet annoyance at the silly work. Was there, after all, any way to make sense of this quack stuff? His eyelids burned, the lamp blinked dully. It occurred to him that he had not even had dinner. It looked so strangely gray and foggy in the room.

Then the door opened all by itself. A friendly-looking old man with white hair and beard smilingly stuck his head in and approached Peter with

silent steps. He immediately recognized his lost uncle.

“I thought you were dead, dear uncle,” Peter whispered, and the old man answered in a barely audible whisper:

“Not dead, not dead, little Peter, there is no death at all. Why aren’t you looking for me? There you have the book in which the way is marked.”

“I can’t find it,” Peter groaned. “There is nothing in the book.”

The old man smiled, threatened with his finger: “Hurry up and search, search hard, my boy! Hehe!”

The laughter sounded unpleasant, his uncle lifted his yellow hand and struck the top of the desk with a bone.

It was the flute. It had fallen to the floor with a loud sound.

“Fell asleep...” said Peter, shivering, gathering up the sheets of paper he had written. The wind chuckled in the stove. It was so uninspiring, so deathly dull in his uncle’s library. A furious longing for a human voice seized Peter.

He took the lamp and descended the stairs. Shadows danced before him across the hallway, a night bird cried piteously outside in the garden. Was Notburga asleep or was she still awake? He groped for the iron handle. The door to her chamber opened.

Upright and frightened, she sat up in bed, her eyes wide open. A thick golden braid lay on the white round shoulder; the coarse linen shirt had shifted.

“The Lord...,” she said.

Peter set the heavy lamp on the table.

“Are you angry with me, Notburga?” he said timidly. “I didn’t know... It was so eerie up there...”

Something stirred under the diced blanket, and crawled out purring. It was the cat. He gently grabbed the trusting animal...

“At least you have company...” he murmured, blood rising to his cheeks.

She narrowed her eyes, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Go out master,” she said, “I want to get up and warm the food. I have been waiting, but the Lord has not come down.”

“Don’t eat...” A gulp came in his throat.

His heart pounded against the chest wall. A smell like fresh hay almost took his senses away.

He took a step toward the bed, sat on the edge. Unaware of what he was doing, he groped for the girl's cool upper arm, shuddering violently at touching the naked flesh. She twitched softly. Her lips moved, her big blue eyes, still quite child-clean, looked past him far into the distance. Only weakly she resisted his uncertainly groping hot hand. Parts of her body shone up, pink and white, downy. A tremor ran through her firm body. And suddenly she threw her strong arms around his neck, pulled him down, stammered....

“It has to be... it just has to be...”

Her hard breast thrust towards him, her lips kissing wetly and awkwardly, like children kissing.

“My dear you...” she cried out. “Make me a – baby boy...”

When he came to his senses, remorse assaulted him with the force of a violent body ache. Terrible things had happened. He had abused the trust of the childlike girl, attacked her in the night, and desecrated the virgin body forever for the sake of a tickling minute. She was completely silent and defenseless, there was a dreamy gleam in her eyes and she smiled forlornly as he let her heavy golden hair slip through his fingers with wafting emotion.

Thoughts rushed at him, which he was incapable of ordering.

“Notburga...” he stuttered and immediately fell silent.

Then she put her hand delicately on his lips and said:

“Don't talk now... I'll cry.”

Then he took the lamp and slipped away.

As he lay, tormented and sleepless, in his uncle's four-poster bed, gazing fixedly at the footboard, still unable to think properly, his eye found letters carved into the bed wood. He shone the light on them and read under ancient, intricate squiggles of words:

One man knows not  
Much of another  
What does he know  
Of God's game.

He had slept so long already in the old bed of his uncle, and still had never discovered this strange saying. It just had to be today, as he lay there embarrassed. More than once he jolted awake, thinking he could hear a soft whimpering coming from below, through the walls and floors.

But it was only the wind that went around the house and carried the spring on its wings.

## SECTION SEVEN

As he awoke from a restless sleep, the experience fell heavily on his soul. He did not feel any different than when he had gone away, in order not to meet his mother. What would happen now? But Notburga, who put the steaming soup in his room, showed herself no differently than usual, only closed her eyes a little and immediately went to work in the kitchen and the henhouse. Then he took the opportunity and went down to the village.

Something had happened. The people were standing together in groups, talking seriously and weightily. Hornauss leaned against his ruminating draft oxen, spat and said to him as he passed by, greeting him:

“It’s about time. Pfelderer, the fine fox, is already up and away towards the Scharnitz.”

Peter looked at the broad-shouldered peasant in amazement. Old Josele Patscheider, with the chin and cheeks of his tanned face covered with silver stubble, talked to a frizzy-haired lad who had come up from the valley. Two worn-out, prematurely aged peasant women stood bluntly, hands folded in surrender. Christian Lergetpohrer came running out of the Rose Inn in his shirt sleeves, a wine pipe in his hand, and called Kloiber Dominik and Kinigadner by name.

“On Saturday, man, the others will come and after the prayer bell in the morning everyone must be at the Helmoos, each with his torch and other weapons.”

Pondering looks passed over Peter in his fine blue jacket and urban hat. Was it permissible to speak so bluntly in front of him?

Hornauss, however, made room for him and shouted, “Hear what the boy brings for a message.”

Once again the young messenger had to recite the whole litany:

That the river and the streams carried blood and flour, that already in the night small rafts with burning lights in paper wrappings floated down towards the lowlands. Teimer was already very close, and at Helmoos everything should be in place, even the non-armed, with scythes.

The people with scythes, spiked maces, flails with nails and whatever else they could muster to help the marksmen. Then wood, pitch and straw



should be eagerly carried to the mountain tops to light the chalk fires. Again and again the lad had to repeat his message before they let him go on with his notched messenger stick into the neighboring valleys.

So it seemed things were going to become serious in the land of Tyrol. With conflicting feelings, Peter broke away from the gathering and went toward his home.

“The fools!” said someone next to him. It was Federspiel.

Shrieks of yelling flew up. There was a general growth of excitement and joy at the coming battle.

“I suppose you’ll join in?” Peter looked questioningly at the hunter.

“Me? Against my German brothers? Before that my heart shall wither in my belly!” the young man started up and shook his fist at the village.

“Is it not the old, shameful game again? There the poor mountain people hope for the emperor in Vienna, who would perhaps laugh if he saw the childlike faith in the peasants’ faces. No, don’t tell me, Herr Storck! The Bavarians have come in quite clumsily and roughly, have touched with clumsy claws what is sacred to the people, or rather; the asses of officials have done that. But because of this, the noble German blood over here and over there should be left to seep away on stone and moss, so that the Welch scoundrel can take his pleasure in it?”

A dark vein stood coiled on his brow.

“You are perhaps too little of a peasant, Herr Federspiel, to quite understand the people here,” Peter sought to reassure him. “I feel much the same as you.”

“What, me not a peasant?” the other laughed wickedly. “Is it because I studied for two years in Innsbruck? There is nothing in me but peasant blood and peasant spirit, and my heart is firmly and faithfully attached to the land and the people here. But should I help to cause a great misfortune? Germany lies in heavy bonds. What a mighty nation cannot accomplish at present, shall this poor country carry out? Dear God in heaven, it was not necessary that they poured the blood of oxen in the water. The water will soon turn red with noble blood, and the chalk fires that will burn will be the poor huts in the land.”

“- Ah, I’m going up where I don’t have to hear the bawling and whooping. Up there, on the Shellbock is peace and quiet...”

“May I go with you?” asked Peter, seized with a fierce desire to go up the mountain.

“Always,” nodded the hunter. “Do off the jacket with the long tails and put on other shoes. I’ll wait outside in the meantime.”

Storck quickly changed his clothes, had Notburga, in passing, pack him bacon and bread, and remarked that he would not return until evening. She stepped with him in front of the house and said, not without concern, “I only hope that nothing happens...”

He laughed sheepishly. Federspiel stepped closer and slightly twisted his mouth when he saw the new woolen sweater and the unused, heavy shoes.

The path led up through the woods, turning right and left to soften the worst of the inclines.

“You gave up studying altogether?” Peter asked as he followed Federspiel.

“Had to, as mother died. And the scholarship, which I could have lived on if need be, I lost because they caught me and another one in the Sill Gorge, as we were making a deal with the thrusting swords. I am actually from South Tyrol. But my mother was from here and from her I inherited the little house next to Patscheider. Now I live there, if you can call it living.”

A coughing fit shook his narrow chest.

“So we are both fated to live,” Peter said.

The hunter stopped. Deeply he dug his mountain stick into the damp moss.

“Comrades in fate? You think so?” he grimly groaned out. “Have you been forced to watch your sister being raped to death by a couple of French hounds like my twelve year old Burgele? Have you also been tied up to a chestnut tree with rope in front of your father’s house and did you also scream until you hung unconscious? Ah, Jesus, Jesus!”

He struck his forehead with his clenched fist and turned away. Then he shook his head slowly, had to cough again, and kept walking.

Peter froze at the outburst of such wild pain. “Forgive me...” he begged. “I didn’t mean to remind you...”

“There is nothing to forgive.” Federspiel stopped once more. “After all, you couldn’t have known anything. But don’t think that I sat behind the stove and cried. I was only a half-grown boy, but I went after them. I only found one. He was lying drunk in a stable in Brixen. I sat with him for a

long time and thought about what I should do to him. First I wanted to cut off his throat, and then I thought:

‘Stab him in the stomach, he must suffer longer! He’ll have to suffer longer! In the end, I ran my jackknife like lightning into both of his eyes and left the barn. - But no more of that, Herr Storck no more! I am sick, I know it well, and I must not get so excited. It can easily make my blood rise. And the other two - I’ll never find them again! The screaming of the one I blinded, I often have to hear in my dreams...’

Silently he went on. The path became steep and stony, and it was difficult for Peter to follow the long, springy steps of the experienced climber. The high forest gradually receded. The trees grew smaller and sparser, seeming to duck and climb on their knees in the sharp thin air. More and more frequently the naked gray ribs of the mountain appeared. Fields of tinder spread; flexible, creeping, scaly pines, hard and frugal, defied the stony wasteland. And in the midst of them lay green meadows, short-grassed and smooth; huts, aged-brown and half-ruined, emerged, open stables; everywhere, pierced by the withered grasses of the previous year, lay the dry dung of cattle among the scattered boulders, on which bright red and sulfur-yellow lichens were rampant. As the two neared the first hut, there came one shrill whistle, after another, which rumbled dully over the board shacks and fell silent.

“Groundhogs,” Federspiel said.

On a smooth block of mica they sat down and ate a few bites. Burning, fragrant Gentian schnapps ran from Federspiel’s bottle between Peter’s lips.

A single, brave stone pine had taken root here and grown, defying the storms. Now, of course, it stood dead and withered on the cruel height. Forest ants had built a spherical house around its trunk. Unbowed even in death, the proud tree towered. A crucified man with dripping wounds was nailed to the trunk.

“If you want to dare something,” the hunter interrupted the silence and packed up, “I want to show you the chamois garden.”

Without waiting for the answer, he rose and went ahead with a steady step. The untraveled pasture was left behind. Soon they were in the middle of an impenetrable green tinder field, climbing on a narrow goat path between lying, serpentine branches. When they were on top of the scree, above which the naked walls loomed threateningly, Federspiel took the

sharp-toothed crampons from his backpack and helped Peter to put them on. He tightened the straps, and checked for tightness.

“And you?” asked Peter, somewhat daunted by the vast solitude and silence.

“I just have to pay more attention than usual,” was the lighthearted reply. “It’s worth the trouble just to look into the chamois garden.”

For a little way it still went very well on the path, which stretched upward along the wall. Then, however, it suddenly stopped, and in its place a band of grass led diagonally upwards. Federspiel entered it without thinking. Step by step he climbed up. Peter followed him. The toothed irons firmly and securely gripped the ground.

But when, after a while of breathtaking climbing, Peter saw terrible falls below him and next to him only the smooth wall, a light dizziness went through his brain. His knees began to tremble, his foot became unsteady. The advancing hunter seemed to suspect the feelings of the mountain stranger.

“Don’t look down and pay close attention!” he instructed him without looking back.

Alpine jackdaws, black birds with red beaks that must have had nests here, dropped from above with a shrill “kjak”, somersaulted in the air and rose again in confusing lines, mocking the abyss and human helplessness. They brushed past Peter with hatred, so that their wing feathers almost touched his face, and jeered at the ponderous man, who clung fearfully enough to the wall and peered out with a sweaty brow for a grip and a kick. Again and again, the climber, who was completely unaccustomed to climbing tried to follow the example of the guide, who had probably often walked this difficult path. Surely he knew every stone, every especially dangerous point and his terse calls were always understandable and helpful. The wicked path seemed endless, and then came wide slabs, still difficult enough; little stones that crumbled and disappeared with a hollow whiz into an infinite void, a larger piece that came loose under Peter’s unpracticed foot and started rolling was silently swallowed by the infinite. No sound announced its impact in the depth.

But after a while it got better, a wide ravine was still to be crossed and then came a chimney, not difficult to conquer. The last help was a hand of the hunter, and a strong pull and swing carried the exhausted man upwards.

Breathing deeply, Peter stood on the broad slab of the Schellbock peak, glad of the goal he had achieved.

When he had composed himself and his overly strained heart beat more calmly, he looked around him. What he saw in terms of vastness was of intoxicating size and violence. Green and stone-gray cones stretched up on all sides, staring jagged, pitiless heads. Distant valleys of dark and light green lay far below, icy distant ones reflected bluish-white, greenish iridescence in the sun. Flat and unsightly below them lay the Black Hen, between it and the Schellbock went the dark deep cut of the gorge through the mountain, The stream sawed through rock and forest, hidden in a secret, wet gorge. The Haberer stood aged and ancient beside the deep-saddled Glui pass, and to the left the chunky Hockauf blocked the view. Only a part of Sankt Marein could be seen because of the stone skull.

Peter found the Zeitlanghof. He recognized its window, in which a tremendous gold fire of sunbeams sparkled.

Beside the razor-sharp ridge of the reddish Fire-Rider rose monstrously the Urtoz, a decapitated giant with square shoulders. Beside him heaved the Wild Man, girded by the ice of the Rauhes Glacier, and farther over, towering brightly in the blue, swam the cone of the Old Man. Far away, one looking over the other's shoulder, the Swiss Alps shone in the eternal snow.

Federspiel smilingly gave him time to enjoy the magnificent panorama and told him the names of the peaks, one of which, in contrast to its appearance from below now showed a completely changed shape. But then he knelt down and crawled up to the edge of the summit. Carefully he pushed himself forward, pulled Peter, who had followed him, close to him and peered into the depths.

"There it is..." he said in a peculiarly soft, almost tender voice, pointing down.

Down the middle of the immense vertical wall of the Urtoz before them fell a silvery, veiling waterfall into a small round lake in the midst of a meadow deep below, so green that it shone up like an emerald. The delicate curtain of water let one see the entrance of a cave that opened darkly behind it in the wall. From the lake formed by the falling water, it flowed off again as a stream and disappeared into the wall below Peter and Federspiel. Surely there was also a subterranean maw through which the run off went, and perhaps it was the same stream that roared through the gorge and past Sankt Marein.

Fine misty haze rose from the water in the dizzying depths. Broad groups of tall tree-like, dark green shrubs surrounded the bright meadow. And on its grass moved small dark spots.

“Do you see the chamois?” whispered Federspiel delightedly. “They still wear their winter coats, their black and brown. Thirty-two I count. Down there, they have their secret garden and are safe.”

Peter clearly recognized the white cheek patches of the dark, quietly grazing deer. The animals alone knew the way to this green paradise which surely no human foot had yet entered.

“The trees down there are bearing foliage at this hour...” wondered Peter. “And how can trees grow at such a height?”

“No wind touches them, and no frost. Can’t you feel how warm it rises? The water steams, so the spring is warm. And the trees, yes, I’ve thought a lot about them. Namely, soon it will be when they bear red blossoms or leaves in the middle of the green foliage. And then, the many trunks will stand next to each other! Sometime I will find the way down. Where the goose goes, man must be able to go,” he said, more to himself than to his companion.

For a long time they lay like that on the hard stone and looked into the frightening and yet so enticing depths, until Peter, again seized by dizziness, closed his eyes and reached for the hunter’s arm. He gently pulled him away from the edge.

“There, now rest a little, Herr Storck. Sleep for half an hour, it will do you good for the first time.”

And since Peter did not contradict, he pushed him the folded weather patch as a pillow.

Peter suddenly found himself back in his apartment in old Blumenstöckel in Vienna, and Ludmilla, bent over and white-haired, kissed his hand and begged him not to go away anymore. She had endured so much fear. And there was also a visitor, who had been waiting for a long time. She opened a door in the wall, which the young man had never seen. There was a small garden outside, a vine arbor with reddish grapes hanging in its light green leaves and vines, and in the arbor all serious and silent sat his brothers in color, Laurenz Bartenstein with his big shaggy foxhound, the jolly Senior Kropf, Thoman and the tree-tall Stepf and between them the beautiful dark-haired girl.

“At last you come, Brother,” said the senior Bartenstein solemnly and made a gesture with his hand toward the Holde. “The bride is ready; the guests will be here in a moment.”

At these words a tremendous radiance spread through the arbor, a glow so bright that it hurt the eyes. He raised his hand to hold them out protectively and awoke; the sun was at Noon height and shone straight in his face.

Federspiel immediately got up and they slowly descended. They did not speak much to each other. Each was busy with his thoughts.

“I thank you, Herr Federspiel,” said Peter, as they stood at the lattice of the Zeitlanghof. “If you will permit me, I would like to share more often in your ways.”

“You need only say so,” nodded the other. “For the rest, I suppose we both feel the same way. In this singular time, the longing for contact grows, and being alone is too hard to bear.”

## SECTION EIGHT

With an uneasy heart, Peter walked toward the house. It seemed necessary to him to talk to Notburga about what had happened, which now could not be changed. Nevertheless, he did not immediately find the courage to do so, and waited in his room until she entered with dinner, taking the earthenware plates, the wine jug and the bread on the table. Then he set himself a new deadline, and it was only when she reappeared to carry off, he asked her to stay, as he needed to talk to her. She looked at him and turned a deep red. But then she just shook her head silently and left the room. He clearly heard her close her chamber door and push the latch forward. In deep discomfort he remained seated.

But nature was stronger than his restlessness. Great weariness drove him to bed before time, and quickly he sank into dreamless slumber.

‘In the morning shouts outside his window awoke him. Staggering and drowsy, he stuck his head out into the cold morning air. The innkeeper of the Rose was standing below and called out:

“Up, up, Herr Storck! We are moving together to the Helmoos. Everyone must keep up who is a good imperial!”

He put a wild whoop on it, and all around bright jubilant cries answered.

So it had become serious. Peter dressed hurriedly, drank a bowl of milk and ran downstairs.

Christian was waiting, looking very handsome with his broad green hat lined with silk, dark red jacket, black leather pants and snow-white stockings. He had the brass-studded bullet rifle, angular and heavy, slung over his shoulder on a broad embroidered band and at his side a long deerstalker.

“It’s going to be fun today!” he shouted as Storck stepped out of the gate. But immediately his good-natured face became distorted, and in his eyes there was a shadow.

“What is this? Without rifles and weapons? There are quite a few rifles in the Zeitlanghof. Or don’t you want to go out with us?”



Peter answered evasively that he wanted to hear what it was all about, and he was not a Tyrolean. The innkeeper measured him for a long time, but said nothing more and they went ahead on the path that led above the village, below the Schellbock peak to the Helmoos.

Many were on this hike. Everywhere small groups of armed peasants, who had come from other valleys to the meeting place, were moving, handsome boys with pointed mountain hats, old men with white hair, half-grown red-cheeked boys who could not get enough of shouting and yodeling.

“Teimer himself is there and will talk,” Christian explained excitedly. “Zangerl is also up here and I saw Father Archangelus yesterday. A message from Archduke Johann is supposed to be there, and the compatriots who were in Vienna with the imperial majesty are back. It is time, they say. Meanwhile it’s time to start beating the Bavarians. Too bad we lost Pflederer!”

“Thank God,” Peter almost said.

He had kept a good memory of the fat, jovial bailiff.

A buzzing, rhythmic noise was heard. Soon Peter recognized the dull rumble of beaten drums and the shrill cry of pipes. When the forest opened up before him, a picture presented itself, which engraved itself unforgettably in his soul.

About a thousand peasants of all ages in holiday costumes, brown-red, green, gray, from all the surrounding valleys, stood gathered around a large tree stump, on which stood, arms crossed, a strange man in threadbare overcoat and gauntlet boots. At his sides Peter caught sight of Zangerl von Prutz, who had warned him at the time in the Rose Inn against careless talk, the red-bearded priest who had exorcized the possessed nun, and a man who must have been seven shoes high, a tall solid fellow, a splendid, jolly giant, who devoutly clasped the shaft of an ancient silk flag. The faded fabric was billowing with all its bullet holes and rips merrily in the morning breeze, sending the red, gold-armored eagle flying. Four lads with heavy green and white shielded drums and two with mallets stood by the flag. The mallets were at rest.

The square was filled with arms. Beautiful flintlocks inherited from forefathers flashed with brass fittings and mother-of-pearl inlays, powder horns, pitch forks, long-pointed war axes, maces, gray shimmering bent scythes, flails studded with nails raised up, and waved as if in impatience

and longing for a hot drink. Tremendous, restrained strength trembled over this bunch of defiant peasants. Defiance clenched into thunderclouds, long-repressed anger intoxicated and seethed. Again and again the tension made itself heard in loud trilling cries and shouts, which the mountain threw back exultantly.

Peter was gripped by the strong excitement emanating from these people ready for the extreme effort. He stood by himself, purposely keeping in the background, making sure that he was not much noticed. All eyes were on Teimer, who still stood motionless. For the first time Peter saw the tobacco merchant from Klagenfurt, whom the folk from the Upper Inn Valley seemed to know so well. Emotionally, he recognized the determined drive in the man's calm eyes, the indomitable will that was hidden in an inconspicuous figure. This former student from South Tyrol made Peter realize, before he had spoken a word, without a doubt that something terrible, but also great, was about to happen. Teimer nodded briefly to the oldest of the minstrels standing next to the waving flag, and immediately the battle drums began to beat again.

The mallets danced on the bare skin, the wooden cross pipes lifted to practiced lips. Brightly, a May song seemed to ring out. But it was a strangely provocative song and it cried out for red blood.

"The Spinges march! The Spinges March!" several cried delightedly. Hats flew into the air.

"High Tirol!" they shouted. "The brightest!"

The high notes twitched, driving their marching beat into the limbs, the drums rattled, the red eagle on the old flag spread its wings with the golden clover stalks.

Then Teimer raised his arm. Soundless silence fell.

"Tyrolean's, countrymen!"

The loud voice went over the whole wide square. "With the help of the divine heart, we now want to put an end to the Bavarian mischief once and for all and chase the foreign sows out of the country for all time. You have seen the first sign on the water. Secondly, so that everyone knows, the chalk fires from our mountains will be seen throughout the country, and when this is done, each company under the leadership of the elected captains shall march without delay on Innsbruck. Thus writes our good Archduke Johann to me and everyone can read the same writing with his own eyes."

‘You will not remain Bavarian for much longer!’ “Those are his words.”

He waved a folded paper. The cheering that broke out shook the air, two or three shots cracked, and the forest gave thunderous echo. It took long, until a halfway silence fell. Again the loud voice blared from the tree stump:

“Let’s go, brothers! The chalk fires are at the same time a sign that General Chasteler is advancing from Oberdrauburg and that Speckbacher is coming from the lowlands to win Innsbruck for the Emperor. Each one take with him a certain amount of bacon or other smoked meat, bread, brandy and whatever he needs for himself. But powder and lead are the main things, and if a good marksman has need of a firearm, I will show him where to find one. Dear compatriots, it is a cruel matter that is now beginning in the whole of Tyrol. Bright blood will flow, the hand must not tremble to take the enemy’s life, and the eye must aim at human bodies! We must be as hard as the rock! The Bavarians were also hard and had no mercy, not with men and not with cattle. Exterminate them for that reason; slay them when they turn themselves in. There is no fifth commandment, if one must strangle for the honor of God. If there are innocent people among them, God, the Lord will deal with them according to His mercy. We are only human and must help ourselves as we can. Remember how we have had to defend ourselves in the nineties against the French beasts who broke in like wild beasts, violated the little children, and took the Corpus Christi in the churches desecrated with their filth. Horror seizes us when we remember it. And now, brothers, the time has come. You should realize and know that the Tyrolean land cannot be given back and forth like the boys cheating apples and pears with each other in the streets. They should realize that their shameful actions have come to an end forever. Just think of the reverend priests they chased out, of the poor people to whom they closed the factory and who now roam around begging without bread and work, of the tormented women, of the poor girls whose blood is rotting in their living bodies because of the French disease, to the young boys whom they have put into the disgraceful blue uniform. Damnation, I would soon have said, cut off their thieving claws that reach for the sanctuaries, smite their mouths that blaspheme God daily, tickle them with the maces where lust dwells, so that they leave our wives standing there, rush the hot lead into their stomachs, so that they are finally satiated! Hold firmly together, do not

hesitate when the hour comes. Hail to our Christian Catholic faith, hail to our emperor, hail to our Tyrolean land!”

A roar of enthusiasm went up; the drums beat anew, the sound of the cross pipes danced lacy above all, stubbornly holding to the Spinges March.

And then, like the roar of an organ, a half-solemn, half-funny song rose up, almost jokingly punctuated with words of anger that were, however, bitterly serious. Verses of the battle song from the same days in which the Spinges March had inflamed the South Tyrolean strikers.

Lynx, marten, wolf and fox -  
Fire the rifles swiftly,  
Gragg, grigg, gragg -  
Pumm! Pumm! Around and around.

Peter was as if under a spell, heard the muskets crack, the whistling bullets strike, the groans of the hit. And yet it was only a simple song. Slowly the gathering dispersed. He hurried to gain the way ahead of the others, pretending not to hear the shouts of Christian, who had spotted him and called Teimer’s attention to him. Federspiel was waiting in front of his house. His face showed sadness. Peter pulled him with him through the garden door.

“We can’t stop it,” the hunter spoke through his teeth, “misfortune is here.”

Evilly the painted Death squinted at the entrants, his feet in fan shoes, the cross pipe at his thin lips.

Notburga was not at home, and had probably gone to the village to the women, who fearfully heard the noise of the men. They knew what it meant when the dusty drums began to thunder, when the sails called....

Peter was glad to get into the library with the former student unnoticed. It was not necessary for everyone to know that he had made friends. He walked towards the window and closed it; for still it was thundering and shouting in the forest.

“What will become?” he said sorrowfully.

The former student looked sorrowfully out into the landscape.

“What will become? Who knows? Great misery certainly, hardship, atrocities of all kinds. And one would think that the poor peasants could care less whether they have an emperor in Vienna or a king in Munich. If

one wanted to think, one might even think that Munich was still the lesser evil...”

“You are entirely Bavarian, and that is not right in the hour in which the country is rising,” Peter revolted.

“Herr Storck,” said Federspiel, looking at him fixedly. “I am neither Bavarian, nor do I want to be Austrian. I am a German and nothing more. And let us not quarrel because of the ruling house. To me one is like the other.”

This manner was unfamiliar to the Viennese. He found such speeches uncanny and upsetting, and involuntarily had to think of the day when he had seen in Vienna a train of so-called Jacobins rattling chains, surrounded by guards, loaded onto wagons. It was said that on the Spielberg in Brünn they were kept in underground holes, which were filled with water, to be miserably suffocated.

“Beware!” he warned Federspiel.

“I am not afraid that you will betray me,” the latter casually defended himself. “They can’t strangle the thought of freedom or lock it in dungeon walls. Whether this sore breast breathes, in which it lives, or whether it rests decaying in the earth, it soars and soars high above tyrant power and dullness in the eternal light... Do you know what the emperor said in Vienna when he had to cede Tyrol? He laughed: ‘Now, they will leave Luxemburg to me after all! That was all.’”

“I won’t and can’t believe that!” cried Peter, his cheeks burning. “The Tyrolean’s know what they are fighting for!”

“The Tyrolean’s! Remember later what I, Serafin Federspiel, said in April 1809: If things turn out badly and the good people who sacrifice themselves are in the power of the enemy, then the emperor in Vienna will not lift a finger to save them, even if it would only cost him a word.”

“Herr Federspiel, I don’t want to hear such talk!” interrupted Peter. But at this he remembered how his uncle had fared in Vienna, and he swallowed the rest of his retort.

The other smiled to himself and then said, “As you wish! Truth always tastes bitter. I suffer from the gift of seeing things as they really are, not as we would like them to be. And I don’t want to mock, because my heart aches when I see the fresh boys and the strong men go to their deaths and can do nothing against it.”

Tears suddenly welled up in his eyes, and Peter felt remorse for his brusqueness. Why was he concerned with the emperor in Vienna? Was there not the shadow of one of the many behind him who had been grievously wronged by rulers?

“Let’s have a drink, and here’s to it ending well!” he joked forcedly, running downstairs and fetching the big jug of red wine from the pantry.

“To the health of all German lads!”

He raised the full glass and toasted with the hunter.

To distract, he told Federspiel his experience with the mute charcoal burner and Sylvana.

“And did you go with her to the green forest?” laughed the other with awakening mirth. “She lets herself be taken like a young bird!”

“Precisely because of that,” said Peter.

“What does that do? Many a young lad, troubled by the awakening strength of his loins, goes secretly to the charcoal yard, and some are also satisfied with the firm charcoal burner’s wife. I’m no better than the others, I admit it. What else can you do on the single shift? Even if people throw their hands up in horror and talk about Sodom and Gomorrah, like the foxy Capuchin... It may seem ghoulish to many, in truth it is not such a big thing. It is nature itself, ignorant, libidinous and naked, and for that very reason without sin, neither beautiful, nor ugly. Do you want to tell the chamois how they must restrain themselves at rutting time?”

Peter found no answer, but changed the conversation, which seemed unedifying to him, and began to speak of that evening when he and Christian Lergetpohrer had seen the descending fire spirits.

The other didn’t reply for a long time, lit the extinguished pipe with much deliberation and took a sip from his glass.

“Do you want to know what I think of these fiery ghosts?” he then said inquiringly. And when Peter eagerly answered in the affirmative, he continued, “If only for your uncle’s sake.”

“So you also think that he was murdered by the spirits?”

“It could very well be,” returned the hunter.

“You believe it? Murdered by ghosts?” Peter laughed irritably.

“Not by ghosts, but by people,” said Federspiel, pressing his thumb on the pipe embers.

“By people...” repeated Peter breathlessly.

The hunter soothingly put his hand on his arm.

“Listen to me, Herr Storck. I, too, have seen the lights. The next morning I went up and searched the place. And there, behind a stone, I found the remains of burnt pine torches. And I don’t believe that fiery spirits also need torches.”

“So they were smugglers!” cried Peter. “And I was right. The Rose innkeeper tried to talk me out of it...”

“Because he knows, as do I and everyone here, that the smugglers, whom I have often met, can only carry their packs up the Glui pass. Or do you think that you can climb the walls you saw from the Schellbock with a hundredweight on your back? They are not smugglers.”

“Who are they?” urged Peter.

“Others. I can’t tell you. But if you want to help, we will track it down. It will take a lot of effort. All the more so as the spirits are only two days a year. The next one is on the twenty-first of September. Who knows if we’ll still be alive by then? With me that is by no means certain.”

He smiled bleakly as Peter made a dismissive motion.

“The mountains guard secrets well. Hark! The drums! I want to go now, so that I don’t run into them.”

“Tell me what you suspect...”

“Nothing definite for the time being, Herr Storck. There’s no point in guessing around. About Laubober, you know that, don’t you? When he died, he said that the devils in the flesh had been after him and had blown him over the wall. - We don’t know anything, Herr Storck, and we must have a lot of patience.”

Slowly he descended the stairs. Immediately Notburga stepped into the room. Her beautiful face was white.

“They are saying down in the village that the men are going to move out.”

“Yes, Notburga!” confirmed Peter.

“And you?”

“I’m not a Tyrolean!” Almost embarrassed, he said it.

Then she quickly bent down, reached for his hand and kissed it. A hot drop hit his skin.

“Thank God - so I am not abandoned...”

“Abandoned...?” He looked at her with questioning eyes.

A soft glow came over her face. “I’m carrying a child...” she whispered, folding her hands. “It has become apparent to me...”

“Are you not deceiving yourself?” he asked, startled.

She laughed, and cried at the same time, put her mouth to his ear and stammered nonsensical tender words. Then suddenly her whole face glowed, and with a bashful sound she fled from the room.

Stunned, Peter remained seated. The sound of bells thundered in his ears. It was the throbbing of blood shooting through the veins, whipped by the faster beating heart. A child!

Outside, the peasant drums rolled, the cross pipes of the people marching home trilled. As dawn began to break, a red flickering star settled on the summit of the Haddock. A second one flared up above the Haberer, and on the Black Hen sparkled a third.

The chalk fires were burning. The time had come. Tyrol stood up, spiked like a hedgehog, it blazed up in fury. A small, defiant people, eager to fight, stood up against the will of that man who held the world in a terrible grip.

Early in the morning, amidst thunderous noise, shouting and shooting, the militia departed. Peter kept inside the house. From the window he saw the brother of the Blacksmith, the mute coal burner, descending the hill. On the shoulder of the woodsman lay the poker, black-hardened, with span-long iron spikes.

When all had gone quiet, Peter descended into the village. The old wife of Josele Patscheider was standing in her root garden, pouring from a full bowl of milk onto the ground. Slowly the white, fat fluid seeped into the black soil. Astonished, Peter watched. She noticed him only when she looked up from her strange work and seemed to be startled.

“Pity about the beautiful milk!” said Peter, with an attempt at jest.

The old woman beckoned him fiercely toward her, her wrinkled face flushed and twitching.

“No one must know,” she hissed, “Not at all. And certainly don’t tell the Father.”

“What does it mean?” asked Peter.

“I suppose it’s an old custom,” she said importantly and mysteriously. “Has gone away, like so many old things. But it’s no good forgetting about it. The young of course, they don’t know it anymore. But I know, I know it well. The beautiful woman comes in the night, two white cats pull her golden chariot, and they know the way to the cobbler’s wife. There is milk for them, there they lick. And in return the woman resists the thunder when



it leads across the heavens, and watches out for the man when he's arguing down there."

Astonished and affected, Peter stood before this stooped, old woman, who brought a libation to sunny Freya, faithfully preserving ancient custom. The tired body of the donor was already leaning toward the earth, and with it the grave would close forever the last saga of the goddess in the cat chariot. He felt solemn.

"You are a young blood, Herr," said the woman, looking at him searchingly. "And I mean you also belong there, between Nauders and Finstermünz, where the men are waiting to be led into the fray. I cannot spare you that!"

Nodding and murmuring, she went into the house with the empty bowl.

Ashamed and disheartened, Peter turned back. During the next few days, the loneliness depressed him greatly. Notburga studiously avoided him, and this resistance irritated him so much that he longed for her.

But all at once she was completely changed, cried, resisted his caresses with strength, and flew into a flaming rage because he wanted to force her.

Her resistance made her seem even more beautiful to him than in the blissful surrender of that night when she had become his own. The swelling strength of her healthy limbs irritated him; he wrestled with her on the rumpled bed, overpowered her and took the weak one. Sobbing, she lay in his arms, with her loosened hair and breaking eyes.

"It should have grown in purity..." she said afterwards, weeping bitterly.

"What are you talking about?"

Her incomprehensible manner made him angry.

"The child. Now it is stained with sin..."

He laughed mockingly. "And the first time... there was no sin?"

She straightened up with flaming cheeks, pulling the torn linen of the shirt over her breasts as if ashamed of her beauty. "I wanted a child. That is no sin. But now that I carry it under my heart, when it already lives as a little human being..."

Confused and deeply ashamed, he let go of her. Now that his excited blood flowed more calmly and the intoxication was over, remorse seized him again. He sought to make amends, gave her tender words, and stroked the wonderful golden tide of hair. But she seemed to pay no attention to him

and wept quietly away. So he left at last, inwardly unhappy and grieved at himself.

Only later did she reappear, calm, with great dignity, conscious of the nobility of her good race.

## SECTION NINE

Days passed, uniform and empty. One Sunday, Christian came back, torn, with powder-blackened hands. He looked aged and changed. The smell of wine emanated from his mouth. With him was Hornauss.

People rushed into the inn, almost pushing Peter off the bench where he was sitting opposite the innkeeper. He had to tell the story of how, on April 11, the Upper Inn Valley militia arriving from Martinswand had decided the battle on Mount Isel. Houses had been blown up in the fire, iron bullets from the Bavarian cannons, humming and splintering through the forest. Speckbacher! Straub! The Bavarians had been beaten so badly that they had to leave Innsbruck, the devilish tails!

During the breaks, Christian poured the red Magdalener down his gullet as if it were water, laughed uproariously and choked often. Hornauss pulled out a gold watch with a melting picture on the lid. Strangely, the gold-framed dance of a colorful Rococo shepherd and his shepherdess lay in his brown cracked claw.

“Look here, women!” Could have had two more of them, ‘tis honest war booty’, even if the bearded Passeirer Innkeeper doesn’t want it. Wow, how we have the Jews of Innsbruck strung up in their holes, Bernheimer and Nathan, we have taken from them the chalices, cloaks of incense, monstrances and stoles which they bought from the church violators. In Saggera, they have stuttered and trembled, locked themselves in lusty fire traps. At Count

Lodron’s we found the noble people who lived in the emperor’s castle, we let them play and dance with us, even if they turned their white and red faces away from our breath. The tobacco and the brandy from the peasants’ ovens stank badly in their delicate noses! But they had to dance!”

“You bastard!” cried Hornauss’ wife and clawed at him. “You had to go dancing, you dirty bear, you?!”

“Be at peace, old witch!” sputtered Christian. “And you, Kinigadner lad, don’t play with my flintlock; its pan has freshly poured gunpowder on it and a sharp bullet in the barrel. Such a dwarf, as you are, such a snotty

Bavarian drummer, I have with the same rifle sent the stuck up snob into eternity.”

He laughed uproariously, his eyes bulged out of their sockets, and the wild yelping turned into a thrusting sob. But he composed himself, looked lost in the circle and stuttered as if in great fear:

“Nothing can happen to me, nothing at all! Father Flavian in Hall has consecrated me. No more guilt of sin on me anymore!”

He thundered on the table so that the glasses danced, and stared confusedly in front of him. “Young he was, that boy, so very young!” - he moaned.

Hornauss quickly took advantage of the opportunity and attracted the attention of the listeners, rambling on about drunks who robbed cash registers, about the riffraff of the city, who were after the storm piles with empty sacks, about Bavarian shields, which were shot to shreds, about the citizens, who hid in fear and showed little joy at the peasants’ victory.

While he was still talking, boys came up from the valley with a message. Teimer let say that it was by no means over. The Bisson Corps was coming down the Brenner, all banged up and worried, but in good order. Every man was needed now. So the usually sober host staggered down the road again, and Hornauss followed him, scolded by his unpleasant wife.

Peter was afraid to be alone with Notburga, who had been at the inn with others and had slipped out of the room, crying, at the unfamiliar sight and talk of her brother. He must have seen her. He himself was tormented by his less than honorable restraint during these fighting days. More than he himself knew, the speeches of Federspiel had lingered in him. Besides, it was as if his uncle stood invisibly behind him, broken and prematurely aged, as if he murmured in his ear in a barely audible dream voice:

“You want to fight for the tyrant, who made me miserable?” He had never forgotten his own father’s petty attitude, who long afterward in a conversation with his mother, understood by Peter only much later, had said of the missing man.

“The exceedingly pert one got off very lightly!”

Everything in him revolted against the pathetic sense of the official, who was filled with horror at the supposed arrogance of the brother who, as a commoner, had dared to lay a hand on one of the “highborn.”

In return for restoring these arrogant ones to their old rights and benefices, he was to go out with the blind-faith peasants, perhaps even to shoot the brother of his best friend Bartenstein, who served as a lieutenant in the Kinkel regiment?

While he slowly walked along the path to the Damned Forest and considered all these reasons, which helped him to overcome the sense of shame of having to stay at home, it gradually became clear to him what hindered him the most, much more than all the conscious considerations, was horror about what was going to happen next in the men's fight...

There was Christian Lergetpohrer, the Rose Innkeeper, Notburga's brother, and the frightening change that had happened to him. The terrible story of the little Bavarian drummer boy whom Christian had shot on Mount Isel had an effect on Peter and left him with a dull horror inside him. Another story came to his mind, which Hornauss had told: a very young boy who was carrying his father's knapsack into battle, an unknown man, had been shot by a Bavarian musket ball, a German bullet, had shattered the lower jaw, half torn away, so that the tongue came out like an agonizingly twisted worm. Mad with pain, the lad, before he could be helped, had jumped into the raging Sill and disappeared in the spray. Horror lay over all this, nameless shudder.

He had come close to the clearing; boisterous laughter and clapping of hands came from there. Cautiously he approached closer. A strange picture opened up before him. In the middle of the green plain with the black circular areas, where only a short time ago the charcoal piles had smoked, stood Sylvana, wrapped in a gold-embroidered blanket of blood-red velvet. She was looking with pleasure at a silver harness with a stone-studded lock. The charcoal burner sat with naked shaggy torso and sharpened a broad knife. Before him, tied to a stake and huddled all together in agony, whimpered a beautiful black dog, after which the smallest of the charcoal burners, spurred on by his mother, beat with a long riding crop while the defenseless animal howled. The woman was cutting wild garlic on a board, apparently as seasoning for the roast. Just then the charcoal burner checked the cutting edge with his thumb and rose to kill the dog. Peter could not bear this. In one leap he was between the dog and the giant's grasping paw. With an angry snarl, the fellow glared at him, his breath coming in gasps.

"Sell me the dog!" shouted Peter, pulling a few silver coins from his pocket, letting them ring.

But the charcoal burner only laughed slurredly and, appeased after all, pointed to a woolen blanket in the grass on which lay glittering things: rings, silver spoons, and a bent medal star. Grinning, he moved his hand back and forth:

‘Don’t need anything,’ the gesture said.

But the boy let a quick glance pass back and forth between the father and the stranger, jumped over and grabbed with his grubby hand at Peter’s coattails, “Let me have your blue jacket and take the dog!”

Without hesitation Peter took off his jacket and threw it to the boy; uncomprehendingly the charcoal burner stared. The boy was quick to the pole, untied the rope and placed the end into Peter’s hand. Then, however, the mute laughed complacently, slapped his knees, and pointed to the freckled boy, who had immediately put on the jacket and walked around with dragging tails. The woman, too, laughed brightly. Anxiously, the animal huddled between Peter’s legs.

“Am I beautiful?” cried Sylvana jealously, dragging the purple blanket behind her like a train. “Do you like me now, you?” She smiled at Peter seductively.

“You are very beautiful!” he said hastily, “And I like you very much.”

Then she laughed merrily and danced around him.

Slowly, dragging the quivering dog behind him, Peter gained the shelter of the forest. He heard the woman suddenly scold him angrily and ask what was to be eaten. Her speech had an effect. The charcoal burner suddenly made a few awkward long jumps after Peter. But right after that he hit hard.

The boy had tripped him up and now ran away from the angry man, shrieking and swinging Peter’s blue jacket.

Peter walked on quickly. The dog seemed to know that the man next to him was his savior, and pushed his wet muzzle against his hand. Touched, Peter stopped and patted the wagging animal’s lean flanks. Then a pine cone hit his cheek hard.

‘Startled, he looked around. He was already quite far into the forest; the charcoal yard was behind him. Nobody was there.

He walked slowly on. Again a cone flew past, this time close to his head. He looked around in a flash. Something small, white scurried behind a trunk.

“Sylvana!” he shouted and had to laugh. Immediately she appeared. She wore a clean white shirt and a woolen smock.

A large strange flower was stuck in her hair, glowing a burning red.

“So you like me now?” she smiled, brushing against him like a cat; the dog growled softly.

He ran his hand over her wispy hair, undecided what to answer this wooing child who was unable to awaken any desire in him.

She took his hand, brought it to her apple-sized breast and looked up at him, squinting. He involuntarily had to laugh again.

“Don’t laugh!” she pouted, “I’ve had plenty and I don’t have to chase after anyone. But you’re such a fine one, and I’m as white as you, too. Look here!” And without any shame, she slipped the shirt off her shoulder with a swift movement.

“I can make you go all foolish!” she giggled, and bit him with sharp teeth in the hand so that a drop of blood jumped up, Greedily her rosy tongue ran over the small wound.

Peter jerked his hand back. Growling viciously, the dog pulled its chops back from its teeth.

“Look, he already knows he’s yours!” she laughed again, patting her breasts. But suddenly her eye widened as if in fear or surprise. “I will come to you some time!” she whispered, looked sharply down the path, and with a leap was gone among the trunks.

Dumbfounded, Peter looked after her. A slight noise diverted his attention. A few steps ahead of him on the narrow cart path stood the beautiful Demoiselle whom he had seen in Innsbruck at the table of the blacksmith Fentor.

Involuntarily he took off his hat and stepped aside, ashamed of his inadequate clothing and worried by the thought that the lady might have seen him with the half-naked girl. His heart beat up to his throat. It was her; she had really come to Sankt Marein. A sweet and sore feeling filled his chest.

She brushed him with a glance from half-closed lids and it twitched around her red lips as if she wanted to laugh at the peculiar chivalry of the shirt-sleeved man. And then she was past, floating and light of gait, noble in every movement. The ribbons of her straw hat waved.... Then she disappeared among the trees.

Again something cold and wet touched his hand. It was the dog. He looked at him questioningly with clever eyes and licked the hand that held the rope.

She was there, had come! And Notburga carried a child by him under her heart....

By the way, the dog helped him to get over the embarrassing reunion with Notburga; she immediately took possession of the poor animal with a swelling motherliness, which might have belonged to a Bavarian officer. Peter called the dog "Spirit", in memory of the fire spirits of the mountains. The animal proved to be infinitely grateful to the one who had led it away from the terrible, pungent-smelling scene of the fire, but its love belonged to Notburga from the very beginning. Only sometimes the dog climbed the stairs to Peter's chambers, formally out of politeness, perhaps because the latter sometimes let him lie on his bed.

For the rest, the master of Zeitlanghof paid little attention to the new housemate. With incomprehensible violence, the dull white, lovely face of the strange girl took unrestricted possession of his imagination. In the dream of the night that followed his encounter with her, he saw with unusual clarity her flexible slender figure, her pearly pale face. Already the next morning and on each of the following days, he restlessly circled around the blacksmith's house where she lived. He was not ashamed to question the waitress of the Rose Inn, and was frozen with grief at his cluelessness when he heard that the beautiful stranger had arrived before that day when he had seen the play of the fire spirits with Christian.

But she was as little to be seen now as then, and the white curtains of the little windows of the upper parlor were always tightly closed. When would he ever come closer to the one he already loved?

He now sat in Lergetpohrer's parlor more often than usual, in order to have an excuse for his walks. More than once, out of the darkness of the smithy the dark face of Gervas Fentor emerged from the darkness of the forge, threatening and hostile, as if to keep watch over the beauty who lived in his house. From the window of the Inn Peter could see part of the alley in front of the blacksmith's house, and this tied him to the dull room, which smelled of leftover wine and old tobacco. Apart from him, there were usually only a few old peasants sitting for hours in front of a paltry glass of hooch, talking about the deeds of the Isel battle. Newer news had also come up, fresh tidings of victory that sounded glorious enough. General Bisson



had been captured at the head of his corps in Innsbruck, after having negotiated in vain with Teimer for an armistice or at least a free retreat. On the thirteenth of April, thousands of his soldiers were forced to surrender, and the general himself had his medals torn from his chest, and his white hair disgracefully tousled by angry peasants. Teimer himself was also severely threatened and would certainly have been slain had not a priest taken care of him. And Andrä Hofer had to run up and down the alleys to keep individual wildlings from robbing and pillaging.

The old men shook their heads sadly, biting toothless jaws into twine-wrapped pipe tips.

“They pressed Teimer against the wall in one of the rooms, and the reverend gentleman who tried to talk him into surrendering was boxed in the ears by a rascal with a cross pipe. But then they recognized the spiritual garment, and one of them knocked the cross pipe out of the piper’s mouth. Teimer took advantage of the distraction and was able to get away with his life.”

Peter, who had only listened with half an ear, jumped up, unwillingly stared at by the old men, and rushed out. He had seen Julia.

With great joy he realized that the blacksmith was now ready to march off after all. He stood by the girl, picking up his knapsack and rifle, and talked to her with respectful confidentiality. To Peter, who had stopped in the archway of the Rose Inn, it seemed as if the two of them were talking to each other in a foreign language. But then it was again as if he had been mistaken, for Fentor called loudly to Kinigadner, who was coming down the village street and shouted to him that they were going to Mittenwald in Bavaria and that they had to hurry to get down there in time.

The two of them, with a look that was long enough to see, soon groped along the path, and only when they had disappeared around the bend in the village street did Peter step out of the protective corridor.

Julia glanced sideways at him and went up the path that also led to the Zeitlanghof. Like a little student who, as a dream, follows his beau, Peter walked behind her, unable to formulate any plan to bring about the much longed-for acquaintance. Her own will seemed to have almost the same aim. For in front of Patscheider’s house, where Peter had overheard the old peasant wife’s mysterious libation, she stopped with an abrupt, wonderful movement and looked at him with pursed lips. Displeasure and mockery were in her face. He was startled and thought of stopping some distance

away. But that was no longer an option, so he took a few uncertain steps and lifted his hat.

She stood in front of him, holding the scarf together in front of her chest with her right hand. From dark lashes her gaze met him.

“Why have you been creeping around the house where I live for days? Is it the custom in Vienna to harass women in such a manner?”

The tone of her voice was deep and soft.

“In such solitude,” he said, remembering a saying of Federspiel’s, “I suppose it is not too surprising if the longing for the company of people of the same mental height prompts unusual behavior.”

“Of the same kind?” she returned with clear derision.

“Demoiselle!” he started up, “the house from which I come enjoyed a reputation of which I may be proud. Do you, however, think yourself better and more distinguished, I beg your pardon for my arrogance, which stems from sincere sympathy.”

She looked into his flame-red, unhappy face, and her look became serene, almost mischievous, as she said, “You are a great child, my lord!”

These words sounded like a caress. He greedily drank in the strange melodiousness of her voice. Oh, she was beautiful, royally beautiful, and the joy of being able to speak to her, to be close to her, had the effect of intoxication.

“Do you really lend me to importunity, demoiselle, when I followed a natural and comprehensible longing and aspired to come closer to you? I live alone in the gloomy house up there, seeing no one but the peasants here, whose rough language I hardly understand...”

She made a graceful wave of her hand and said, “So we know each other now, and you are at liberty to chat with me on a good occasion. Only I do not love to be spied upon, Herr Storck If, then, you value the modest gift of conversation which is at my disposal then refrain from monitoring my doings with spying eyes. Under this condition, a temporary friendly meeting is not undesirable for me either. For this time, however, you must excuse me!”

She nodded to him and entered the house of the old peasant’s wife.

Footsteps sounded behind the surprised and yet extremely happy one. Iron clanged on stone. It was Federspiel.

“Eh, Herr Storck!” he said, glancing at the door where the stranger had disappeared. “We have not seen each other for a long time.”

“Where have you been?” asked Peter, hardly able to tear his eyes from the old wooden door. “It went well on Mount Isel and with Bisson’s Corps...”

The hunter threw a blue iridescent wood grouse on the ground, which he had carried on his walking stick. Peter saw how red beads of blood trickled from a small bullet wound in the chest.

“Gone well? The disaster will only get bigger. Napoleon will not give rise to a second Spain.”

The blotches on the gaunt face of Federspiel stood out sharply.

“I’ve been up there in the Einöd. I’ve been fighting with myself. Grimly scuffling, Herr Storck! Ten times I wanted to go down and run after my countrymen. I wanted to help, but then I pulled the axe out of the chopping block up in the hut and said to myself:

If your hand wants to raise itself against the Germans, then it is better to cut it off, so that it falls to the ground as a cursed and useless thing.

And as I left the hut in the gray light, I heard the primeval cock singing his bridal song. So he had to die to make it easier for me!”

“Nevertheless - it has gone well and will continue to go well, if you also croak mischief,” Peter was excited. “I don’t like to fight the Bavarians either; my father was half Bavarian, and I have known many a good fellow who was Bavarian in body and soul, and it may be the devil’s will that my bullet or his bullet goes into a friend’s chest. Nevertheless, I cannot overlook how badly and wickedly the Bavarians have done it to this poor people, and a lesson is to be granted to them, especially since they are in league with Napoleon. But you, Herr Federspiel, see everything black with diligence...”

“No one likes to hear the truth, and I don’t want to offer it on the open market,” the former student replied. “Well burns in me the hatred against who has trampled my German people into the dust. But my eyes have not yet become blind on that account. The day of revenge has not yet arrived, and everything that happens, happens too soon. The Tyrolean’s are fighting against one who has the power of the prince of hell behind him, against a demon who will drown them in their own blood.”

“Eh, now,” Peter angrily contradicted the stubborn man, “that will have to wait and see. Is it not a joy to see the courage and intrepidity of the mountain people? And whatever you say, for the time being the land is free

of its oppressors, and the question is whether they will be able to take it into their hands so cheaply the next time.”

Federspiel poked with his mountain stick at a stone that lay in the way and said nothing in reply.

Only after a while did he say quietly and sadly, “I can see, Herr Storck, that you have the hereditary defect of our people in a high degree: To judge by the high-minded feeling of a good hour, and not to listen to the harsh voice with which the sober cold mind judges.”

“Very well,” cried Peter, completely forgetting his own attitude. “Let us suppose that you are right, Serafin Federspiel. So in this case, sooner or later French troops will break into the brave Tyrol in place of the defeated Bavarians. How will it be with you then? Your explanation that you don’t want to fight Germans is then really out of place.”

The hunter stretched up high. Cold anger flashed from his eyes.

“In that case, Herr Peter Storck,” he said firmly and slowly, “I shall gladly lay down my poor life for the German cause, even if it were in vain. But that you, of all people, should talk as if what was sacred earnestness to me had been only an evasion in order not to have to move out, that, Herr Storck hurts me.”

He picked up his hunting bag and wanted to pass Peter. In Peter, however, hot remorse welled up and he quickly turned the hunter’s way.

“Forgive me!” he said. “I don’t know myself what drove me to say such ugly things.... Forget what I was talking about. What should I say about myself first?”

“It is already forgotten and over,” smiled the other wistfully, “Your mind is moved, full of vague joy, but also full of tormenting uncertainty. A hunter sees keenly and far, and I know who has gone into this house before which we stand. No hard feelings and goodbye!”

Wordlessly, Storck shook the man’s hand. “There were some up there again...” Federspiel was still saying, pointing his mountain stick toward the Black Hen.

“Fire spirits...”

“Yes. There, where I found the remains of the torches. They have been cleared away. I’ll come to Zeitlanghof one of the next evenings, if it’s all right with you. It’s dangerous to talk here!”

## SECTION TEN

On the following days, despite his immense desire, Peter did not dare to approach the forge. Downpours of rain that fell certainly kept the beauty tied to the house, for he never met her on the short way down to the village. At home he was uncomfortable. The damp box seemed more unlivable and gloomy than ever, and the cold evenings with the crackling logs in the tiled stove made him sad. Federspiel did not visit him either. Perhaps a slight disgruntlement had remained after all. Notburga went quietly and introvertedly to work. It often seemed to him as if she had been crying. A vague feeling that his indifferent behavior toward her could be the cause of secret tears finally prompted him to ask her. But she evaded him, speaking of a violent toothache that would have come as a result of her blessed condition. Sometimes, however, she would stop in his room, as if expecting some tenderness, and after a while, suppressing heavy sighs, went out of the door. One evening, after a long embarrassed silence, she offered herself to him with awkward caresses, almost perishing with shame. With the cruel thoughtlessness of his youth, he gently pushed her away and gave her some order. And to escape being alone with her and more because of the view of the forge, he came more often again to the Rose Inn, where it was now noisy and merry every evening.

Passing through and returning armed men from all neighboring valleys found themselves here, let the wine boil and flow and raged with the shrieking females through the rooms. More than once, in the evening twilight, when Peter was looking for the barmaid without being served, he encountered distinct groups. On the day when he met the young girl, and also Christian's relative, a strange boy, who had always been carefully guarded by him, a wild crowd had invaded Sankt Marein. They were mercenaries returning from Bavaria. They drove cattle before them, among them two beautiful Dutch cows. They were hunting for Zangerl, who had tried to prevent them from plundering the estate of the Bavarian king, Schweiganger, and even more for Sandwirt, who had forbidden all robbery on pain of death and to whom Hornauss had had to hand over the captured watch. They cursed the Welsh in the south of the country, who did not want

to cooperate, and let the Archduke Johann live, who would soon move in with the imperial troops. The few weeks of loitering had turned peasant servants and small land holders into a pack of predatory, feral mercenaries, who marauding alongside the local militia, kept in check by their leaders, turned up here and there as unpleasant companions. Some of this type also appeared at Zeitlanghof, and were badly inclined to become violent and to examine the rooms of the "Master" more closely. But Notburga's quiet manner made them meek, and they contented themselves with a drink from the cellar before departing toward Scharnitz Pass.

At dusk that day, a furious storm roared over Sankt Marein, rattling under the shingles and bending the fir trees so that they groaned. It whined in the stove, the windows clanked with dull thuds, and the equipment in the room crackled.

Peter stepped out onto the balcony, let the storm ruffle his hair, and watched the clouds fly over the last light in the sky.

"Joho! Ho!" it cried above him, black steeds shot past, whips cracked, the hounds baying blew away. The wild host chased, the wild women of the alps rushed past, who trembling sought protection on tree stumps, into which the axe of the lumberjacks piously cut three crosses. - The clouds flew past, the storm roared behind them, and swept the night sky bright. The stars glittered.

Longingly Peter spread his arms. His heart burned with love for Julia, who sat lonely like him in the abandoned blacksmith's house and to whom, nevertheless, no path led. Oh courage, courage! So much courage only to dare the nightly walk, to knock quietly at her window, as the amorous peasant boys did with their girls. He was already thinking of sliding down one of the wooden pillars that supported the cellar, and thus, unnoticed by Notburga, leaving the house. But then it occurred to him in due time that the venture was too dangerous. A rash act could destroy all hopes forever. No, one did not knock at Julia's chamber window at nightly hour.

He closed the door and lit his lamp. The warm smell of oil rose. Again he reached for the mysterious book with the red strokes, for the leaf, on which faded ink told of possessed people. Then Spirit, who lay dreaming on the worn carpet, growled, barking at the door. Federspiel entered.

"It's you?" cried Peter delightedly, putting the book in the drawer.

"At last you come! There's a glass, there's the jug of Terlaner, and in the belly of the fat Porcelain Chinese is tobacco, which I traded with

Voglsanger.”

The hunter pulled up a chair and stuffed his pipe. His face was grave.

“Well?” cried Peter whimsically, “I can tell by the look on your face that you are brooding mischief, friend. Go ahead with your evil prophecies!”

“I’m no soothsayer!” objected Federspiel. “But bad news has come. The Bavarians have taken Strub pass, and Deroy at Kufstein is hanging peasants along the road on trees. On top of that, the fool, Chasteler, wants to go out to meet him.”

“To thunder!” cried Peter, becoming angry against his will. “Don’t you think he should? Must it end badly for him already? He has the heroes from Isel mountain with him...”

“Don’t argue, Herr Storck!” replied Federspiel gently. “I was only answering your question. Who can say how it will turn out! We sit here apart, in a lost corner and hear only one thing or the other, and can easily deceive ourselves. I wanted to talk to you about something else. Something concerning the fire spirits.”

“Something new...?” Peter looked tensely into the other’s face.

“Something strange, anyway. So listen then. Since Kinigadner moved in with Sandwirt, his boy Anderl has been following me. A splendid lad, just a bit too bigoted for my taste, but I want to make a real hunter out of him. So I had him a few days ago, before it started to rain and storm. You know the way, and at the top we looked down into the chamois garden ourselves, just like the two of us used to do. And as we were looking down, the boy suddenly said, hoarse with excitement:

“Serafin, someone is walking down there! And to my soul, there down in the chamois garden, a man was walking through the middle of the herd that was spreading out there, and the chamois remained as if they were house geese and not shy game.”

He took a few puffs from his pipe and nodded with a smile to the astonished man. “No, no, we were not mistaken. It was a live human being, passed quite quietly right through the middle of the grazing chamois and disappeared into the rocky hole over which the veil of water falls.”

“And who? Who?” cried Peter.

“That’s just it. The boy says it was the wanderer. And it seems to me the same. Of course, the distance can be deceiving. I’ve never seen the old man up close!

Unclear feelings beset Peter, strange sensations, mixed from aversion and attraction, when he heard the name, which evoked the image of that old man in him whose peculiar appearance was one of the first and strongest impressions of his arrival in Sankt Marein. It was as if this old man was in some unfathomable way connected with the disappearance of his uncle, as if he alone could obtain from him the solution to the question that had brought him, Peter, to this remote region. But how was it possible for the old man to get into the chamois garden?

“How he got there, I don’t know!” said Federspiel at that moment, as if he had read Peter’s thoughts. “But in any case, there is a way to get there, and I want to find it!” he added.

“Who is this wanderer, anyway?” asked Peter. “I saw him once, - the day I arrived.”

“No one knows him, and he goes to no one,” replied the hunter. “People think he’s a strange pitch collector, because Rangger Blasi has taken him into his hut. It seems that every year such strange birds come to the mountains, looking for ore veins, for medicinal herbs and the like, and then they disappear again. He must be one of them. Soon he is there, soon there. That’s why they gave him the nickname. In any case, despite his age he must be a capable climber, if he can force the walls of the Schellbock. But I’m going to find the path he took. If only I could see the old man eye to eye!”

“He showed himself to me the first day. But what has all this to do with the fire spirits?” asked Peter.

Quite puzzled, the other looked at him. “Yes, you see - I can’t say why. It’s just a feeling of mine.”

He finished his glass as if to mask a slight embarrassment.

“It just seems that way to me. That’s all I know myself.”

He stood up and held out his hand to Peter.

“Don’t talk to anyone about it, Herr Storck. To no one at all!”

When Peter went to his room to sleep and stepped out into the hallway once more, he heard soft singing; it was a sad folk tune. The song came from Notburga’s chamber and floated through the silent house at night. Moved, he listened and understood the words:

Mountain and valley mourn,  
Where I many thousand times  
Have passed over.



That's what your beauty has done,  
Has brought me to love  
With great desire.

“Julia! Fair Julia!” he cried softly, full of sad longing. She who sang  
below was strange and far from him.

## SECTION ELEVEN

The next morning the sky was blue, covered with sun gold and the birds were singing like mad. He called out a joking word to Notburga and climbed up the path to the hogback to find the place where Federspiel claimed to have discovered the torch stump. But soon he was tempted to walk off the trail among the old trunks of the high wood. Dewdrops clung to grasses and ferns and where the sun shone through the green twilight; its ray broke sevenfold in the little waterfalls. On the lowest branch of a larch tree covered with gray lichen was a little owl, which, at the approach of man, lifted the nictitating membrane from its large, amber-colored eyes and looked at Peter apprehensively and seriously as the human approached. He clapped his hands merrily, childishly happy on such a beautiful day. The light-shy wretch snapped his crooked beak and silently flew away. Peter ran after it, saw it stopping again and cautiously came closer. But the night bird had become attentive, could not hold out any longer and flew up again. The game was repeated until suddenly a bright, vibrating sound distracted Peter from his harmless chase.

He stopped and listened. A never-before-heard, sweetly plaintive yet tantalizing melody sang in the deep forest, fabulously beautiful. Like an unearthly voice, luring and sinister, fluted an unknown tonal instrument. - Listening again and again, the young man followed the singing, and was almost startled when he finally saw white figures in motion.

He crept from trunk to trunk, astonishment in his chest. Were nymphs and dryads dancing their secret round dance here? He stood still again, peered, crawled to the next, hundred-year-old trunk. And saw...

In a small clearing a clear spring bubbled out of green moss and formed a crystalline pool. And from this icy, pure water completely unclothed and sprayed with drops of diamonds, drenched by the fire of the sun, rose Julia.

Peter pressed his hand over his mouth in order not to cry out loud with unspeakable delight. The wonderful beauty of the virginal figure, the flawless ivory of the matte white skin, the unearthly symmetry of the slender limbs made him tremble. The appearance was so reminiscent of the

divine majesty of Greek sculptures that it was almost unreal to behold. - Only after a while of blissful contemplation, free of mean sensuality, did he realize that she was not alone. Not far from her lay little Sylvana naked in the soft moss and laughing at a beetle with long feeler horns that sat groping uncertainly on the rosy berry of one of her small breasts. And on a black stone boulder crouched her brother, bare-chested, white as her sister, his under-crossed legs in shaggy pants of reddish-brown goatskin and he held a panpipe tied from many slanting cane pipes to his pointed lips.

Julia stood with her legs closed, her pure face raised to the sun, braiding her black hair that flowed like a silk mane down to her narrow hips. She said something to the playing little girl, who immediately jumped up and turned to her with submissive attention. The boy also looked inquiringly at the white girl, interrupted his play, licked his lips, and began another, more solemn melody, which rang out tremulously.

The child raised both hands above her head with a graceful gesture and slowly began to place her feet in front of each other in dainty and small steps. The crying of the panpipe almost made Peter burst into tears, so strongly did the unspeakably touching and beautiful sight of the dancing girl affect him. A tremendous longing as for a lost paradise, an anxiety for the destroyed innocence of his childhood years seized him with shattering force. He no longer saw the austere beauty of the beloved. His eyes drunkenly followed the heavenly limb movements of the barely blossomed girl to the singing of the panpipes. Sylvana seemed rapt, dissolved in feelings of an unknown kind. She threw back her hair, with half-open lips her child face lifted to the flaming queen in the blue, her round arms stretched upward with palms outstretched in desire. The priestly movements of her supple body expressed so much pious and unrestrained adoration that Peter clasped his hands, completely unconscious of himself. It was to him as if a motionless tree, living only in its deepest, most secret interior, firmly rooted to the maternal earth, now dreamed back centuries and saw things that no human eye could behold in this time. He stood and stared, until an exuberant trill of the panpipe rudely awakened him, Sylvana spun laughing in a terrific whirl, and Julia leaped toward her to catch her jokingly. This game brought him danger. For once the little girl came very close to him. Slowly he slipped, always hiding behind trunks, out of sight of the eavesdropped, until the distant voices were drowned out by the chirping of birds and the silent high forest spread its green twilight over him.

Slowly he came to his senses, the experience had been too strong, the meaning of which he was not able to interpret. After many wanderings, he found his way and discovered that he had come to the charcoal yard. It must have been hours that he had wandered around dreaming, and only now did he feel the tiredness of his limbs. The coarse wife of the absent charcoal burner sat alone in front of the hut and let the child drink as she did then. When she saw the stranger in front of her, a broad grin crossed her face. In a dialect that was difficult to understand, she asked about the visitor's wishes.

Peter inquired whether he could not have charcoal for the Zeitlanghof. Thus he gave a reason for his appearance. But the woman shook her head violently, pushed the child away, wrapped the milk-heavy breast in the cloth and pointed to the empty, black-burned charcoal kilns.

A painful pinch in the upper arm made him spin around. It was Sylvana who had crept up on him from behind. Now he understood the cause of the grin, with which the charcoal woman measured him. She probably meant that Peter knew Sylvana, whose sneaking up she had observed, better than he wanted to admit. Annoyed, he rubbed the sore spot and harshly rebuked the girl. The lovely little dancer was completely absorbed and he saw only a perky little girl in front of him.

She, however, snuggled up to him and looked at him with begging eyes.

"Give me something, handsome!" she whispered.

"I have nothing!" he refused unwillingly.

"Oh yes!" she smiled through white teeth. "You have a green box with little balls in it. It's on your table, give it to me!"

Now it occurred to him. Truly, on his table in the Zeitlanghof there was such a green box with laudanum pills. How did she know that?

"Who told you that?" he asked, looking into her eyes.

She became embarrassed.

"I just know. Will you give me this?"

"The pellets are poison, remember!" he dismissed her. "You can have the box for my sake if you tell me how you know about it."

She bowed her head defiantly. "Someone told me..."

"Who, Notburga?" he continued.

"Oh, her! She won't talk to me. Will you give it to me?"

“No!” he said. “It’s nothing to play with!” She turned away, shrugging, her mouth agape.

A man walked across the clearing and stopped, looking at the group in intemperate amazement. Peter immediately recognized one of the old peasants who had stayed at home, Hans Gschwendtner. The old man carried a flashing axe on his shoulder and took the pipe out of his wrinkled mouth.

“You’re wandering around here?” He stared open-mouthed at Peter.

“Ordering charcoal,” he apologized, uncomfortably touched at being seen here. The charcoal yard was very disreputable in Sankt Marein.

“Well, well!” coughed the old man, walking along beside Peter, who inwardly cursed the unwelcome encounter. For he had just carried himself with the hope, that Sylvana was a way to get closer to Julia in some way, more quickly than before, perhaps to learn something that would tell him about the mysterious meeting at the forest spring.

Now, however, he had no choice but to go back to the village with the grumpy old man.

When they were in the wood, he groped and asked what kind of people they were in the charcoal yard.

“People?” the peasant croaked. “They are not people, they are heathens. None of them has received Holy Baptism, they don’t go to any sacraments, and they don’t keep the fast.

The old and the young are more in heat than bitches when they are hot. The nest should be burned out before our Lord God punishes us all together, that we let them live in sin like this.”

Peter replied nothing, beset by a thousand thoughts. The riddles piled up. The old mute walker in the inaccessible chamois garden, the strange dance at the spring, the girl’s desire for the laudanum pills.

“Is there a place around here in the forest where a well rises out of the moss?”

He had to repeat his question until the hard of hearing old man understood him.

“Certainly there is!” the latter then said, looking shyly around. “There is one down the Schellbock, on the left hand side of the gorge. But I would not advise a Christian man to go there. The well is a poison well, as they are often found in the alps. And there my father’s father once saw four or five naked devils in female form dancing in broad daylight.”

So the secret place was consecrated to furtive dance parties already before times? But it could also be a coincidence. The farmer's ancestor might have surprised some merry women with hidden merriment, which seemed to him to be the devil's work. Naked bathing in the open air was considered by the people in this remote wasteland certainly as shamelessness and sin. Still - the notice was strange and weighed him down even more.

His mood was not improved when the old man, before they parted ways, looked at him piercingly, took the pipe out of his mouth, and quite abruptly said "The gentleman is well grown and strong, not at all a bit of the plot to help chase out the Bayern?"

## SECTION TWELVE

In the evening, the whole village got into the most violent excitement. From the Patscheider's hillside, which lay to the side of the Zeitlanghof, overlooking the house and the lower-lying village, one could overlook part of the Inn valley. There, when Peter stepped out of the door, everyone gathered that had remained behind in the village, roused and frightened by the howling of the bells in the valley. Notburga was the first, who rushed to him, almost speechless with terror. A great misfortune must have happened, she stammered, for the sky towards sunrise was as red as blood.

Peter met weeping women and old men wringing their hands in the agony of their powerlessness. Clearly one could hear the urgent ringing of the bells, carried by the valley wind. Fear and anger tore at the ropes that moved them. And in the very far distance, certainly beyond Innsbruck, the sky glowed with the redness of a monstrous fire. A messenger who had been sent down into the valley and who came back panting reported that they knew nothing, had only heard muffled cannon blows and a ringing of bells from far away, which one passed on at the sight of the bloody sky. Some believed that the city of Hall was in flames, others thought that Innsbruck was threatened by a great fire; that a heavy battle was in progress and that a terrible battle was in progress and that terrible things were happening. Reluctantly and with an anxious heart, Peter finally went to sleep. Before he tried in vain to comfort the weeping Notburga, who was in mortal fear for her brother and, pale as death, let the beads of her rosary slip through her fingers over and over again.

Already the next morning news arrived that crushed everyone. Ashamedly, Peter had to think of the rebuke he had given to Federspiel. How right the hunter's fears had been! Now it was known. General Chasteler, rash and hasty as always, had attempted a battle in the open valley at Wörgl. The Tyrolean riflemen, frightened and quite unaccustomed to fighting without cover, had been cut down in droves by the Bavarian dragoons. Chasteler could only save himself with difficulty. Speckbacher desperately tried to resist the Bavarian General Wrede in the Ziller Valley.

In vain. Cruelly, the captured peasants were strung up by the necks, their dead bodies swinging hideously in the wind.

The churches were completely devastated. On the precious smoked cloaks of gold brocade, on chasubles of heavy old silk lay trampled horse apples, brandy gurgled into neighboring soldiers' mouths from the sacred chalices. The Bavarians advanced inexorably on Schwaz. The militia, confused and leaderless, retreated from the mountain town. Furious, half-crazed soldiery poured into the streets, which for centuries had been peaceful and had preserved civic happiness. A ghastly slaughter began, a desecration, impaling and burning. The poor fought back, selling their lives dearly.

Boiling water hissed bubbling on the looters, heavy stones smashed from the roofs onto the plumed helmets. They boarded up the doors of the beautiful burning houses, where suffocating, conspiring people bellowed. Frenzied ones rushed at the soldiers, biting through the horsehair straps and throats over the red collars, slashed the belly to the breastbone with the stabbing knife. But the Bavarian bayonets were too many. Some that they picked up rattled. Avengers were found there, too. Pitchforks plunged fourfold into drunken faces; bare prongs peered out of the backs of blue commissars,

Horses kicked in the guts of their bodies, which steel had opened in the hands of nimble boys. But all this did not help. Time passed inexorably over the lost city, the minutes ran, the flames ate, the shouting became weak and the rage extinguished in languor and horror.

"Schwaz is all burned up," groaned Anderl, the son of Kinigadner, whom Federspiel had sent down. "And our men are floated away."

"As it says in the prophecy," rose the tremulous, ancient voice of Patscheider's wife. "In its first word it is fulfilled:

"Schwaz burns,  
Innsbruck sinks,  
Hall trickles away."

Giggling - or was she sobbing? - she stooped down and went into her house.

"The people and the cattle, everything shall be gone," the boy reported further.



“‘As a punishment for sin,’ Father Archangelus says. And our people say there is only one thing left: to go to Innsbruck and slay the lords. From them comes the misfortune. Zangerl has talked back to them, has called them snotty peasant sows, then Falschlunger from Pfunds held a loaded muzzle in his face and said: ‘Now shut your mouth or you’re dead.’”

“It’s better that we farmers have the money of the gentry than that the Bavarians pocket it.

And they have only become so wild since they know that it is all over for us in South Tyrol and that Teimer is begging the Bavarians for a truce.”

Saint Marein had never heard such wailing as that morning. Peter was glad when the evil day was drawing to a close. Spirit tried to comfort him with all kinds of doggy affection, but he chased the animal away with harsh words. His heart wanted to burst at the misery of the poor brave people, who now, through misfortune and defeat, also seemed to be falling into inner confusion. He sent the boy to Serafin Federspiel, who immediately disappeared after the sad report. But the hunter told him that he could not talk to anyone today, that he was very miserable. So Peter remained alone in the library with the dancing shadows and the wall scrolls.

The night was bright. A plaintive bird call rose, fell silent, sounded once more from afar and died away. The blowing wind and the muffled rumble of the brook merged into a deep organ sound. A requiem for the dead who had to die so cruelly. Rigid and eternal the jagged mountains stood black against the spark-strewn sky.

In this silence, the thoughts of everything he experienced here rose all the more stormy. The image he beheld at the forest spring tormented him with sweet anguish.

‘But there was also dull fear in him. What surrounded him here; among what beings did he live? What might this remote region conceal and hide? What haunted the slopes of the wild and unknown heights, what went on in the souls of the silent people who lived here, year in, year out, in poverty and heavy plague and had now been seized by the furies of war? Once again he remembered the ancient woman with her strange saying about the three Tyrolean towns; again he saw her secretly offering sacrifices to Freya for the cats. Didn’t the piping boy wear crooked little horns hidden in his hair; have buck’s feet in his fur pants? From what forgotten, unspeakably lovely childhood of man came the tune he blew on his panpipe? Secrets were going around here; all kinds of spooks were weaving in the woods,

showing themselves hostile to the one who tugged at the veils that lay over him. Surely his uncle had perished from his thirst for knowledge, disappeared in the battle with dark forces that ruled here unrestrictedly and did not tolerate any intruder. Sometimes mischievous, sometimes ominous, an inconceivable face peeped out of everything he had experienced so far. And this restlessness in him urged him to solve in every way the riddles that lay in his path like glittering snakes.

Footsteps sounded on the path below, heavy, dragging feet walked toward his house, stopped, pawed indecisively in the gravel. He stepped through the open door to the basement and saw a dark figure leaning against the garden fence.

“Who is it?” he called down.

“Christian Lergetpohrer,” came tonelessly from the garden. “Because I saw the light in your parlor.”

“So you are back?” cried Peter. “Come up and have a glass of wine with me!”

“Lord, I can’t!” groaned the innkeeper, sinking to the ground. “Come down, if you don’t mind. The moon is coming up and you can see well. In the parlor upstairs, among the books, it squats heavy on my chest.”

“Notburga will be pleased...”

“Nothing. Don’t say anything. I just want to talk to you.”

Immediately, disturbed by the strange tone of the voice, Peter left the house. The window door to the cellar had to remain open all night, so that the sticky air would disappear. When he entered the garden, the moon rose pale and clear behind the Haberer and poured milky light over the valley.

Silver dripped from the trees, encrusted the weathered wood of the fence.

“Christian!” cried Peter, muffled. “Are you all right?” He saw the big, strong man sitting on the stepping stone next to the garden gate with his head hanging down. A rifle lay beside him in the grass, a fine beam of light resting on the angular barrel.

“You haven’t been home yet? Have you just come up from the Inn valley?” he asked anxiously, since the other gave no answer.

The host of the Rose started up, looking at him confusedly.

“Yes so, it’s you, Herr? I was already at my house. I looked in at the window. The girl sat on the lap of a smuggler, and he played cards with the others, dealing them out on the table. I already know what happened in my

house. The girl looks all crushed, the little one sits on his lap. Knows everything. That's how it goes when the peasants run around with spears and rifles with bullets and have to play warriors. It's all going to end up like that, all of it."

Peter sat down next to him. "About Schwaz, Christian..., is it really true?"

The innkeeper nodded.

"I wasn't there. We had to retreat. But I've seen enough. Innsbruck is occupied by the enemy, and the windows are full of the blue and white flags, and on the branches grow peasants who are also blue in the face and stick out black tongues..."

"So all is lost, Christian?" Peter grabbed the man's hand, deeply moved.

"Lost? I don't believe the same," said the Lergetpohrer, running his hand over his forehead. "There are reports that Andrä Hofer is fighting with firm and brave men, with Passeirers, Sarn valley folk and Meraners. Down here, Teimer is screaming at the top of his lungs that the highlanders should march on Innsbruck again, and I think he'll soon be up here with us, drumming up everything and whistling for the Helmoos.

When the swells scream, the old Krauterers will also get it in the stiff knuckles, as long as one can still squeeze off a muzzle or lift a barrel.

So it may well be turned once more and a lightning storm comes over Wrede and Deroy so that their arrogance will vanish." He gave a deep groan.

"But it isn't that. It isn't. That's not why I'm here, oh my God, no."

"What is it, Christian?" Peter asked him, moved by pity.

The innkeeper looked around fearfully, as if someone were standing behind him, then sank down and whispered, close to Peter's ear, "It's that I shot the little boy..."

"What little boy?"

"The drummer, the Bavarian drummer, on Mount Isel."

"That's what's bothering you?" said Peter, moved. "Friend, that happened in the fight for the fatherland, so you are not guilty of bloodshed!"

"In battle?" A croak came from Christian's throat. "How then in battle? The Husselhof was on fire, and the drummer stood there and made the drumsticks dance. I thought to myself, you little brat, you lousy, you little

snot, I mean, that's how far my shooting goes. And I whistled the song while I was doing it, the Spingesser song.... there's also talk of a drummer. And so I whistled, took quite rough aim, straight at the beads on the helmet about his head, held out and bang! It threw him down, he screamed like a young animal, and his feet twitched so fast. And such large soldier shoes they had given to the young boy that one of them flew away. Jesus Maria! Herr Storck, it was in battle after all, say it again, it was in battle..."

Peter freed his hand from the aching pressure that enclosed it and said, "Of course, Christian, in battle!" "It's true, yes? And Father Flavian said the same thing and consecrated me and gave me a scapular. Nothing can happen to me before God's judgment seat. Otherwise I have only small sins... not much... for the rest of my life..."

A spasm shook him and he cried out softly, "Then why won't he let me rest? What is he doing standing by my camp at night with his drum and beats it and laughs to it? What do you want me to do to him? I have betrothed myself to the black Mother of God in Absam, but he does not give way. How can he have such power, the rascal, the stupid one, with his red dangles and curly yellow hair?"

A shaking sob came from his chest. Peter searched for words, but then the innkeeper of the Rose jumped up and lurched down the path.

"Christian!" Peter called after him, but there was no answer.

Saddened, he returned to the house. Outside Notburga's door he stood listening. She was in a deep sleep, thank God. Her breathing was quiet. Slowly he climbed the stairs, extinguished the lamp and lay down on his bed, half-dressed and dead tired.

In the middle of the night he awoke. It had been a touch. Something tickled his cheek. He lay very still, listening. Warm breath stroked his face, someone was bending. Two soft lips softly touched his mouth. Hastily he reached out, grasping feminine forms, feeling a firm little breast, a robe, trembling hands that struggled.

"Sylvana, you?" he cried.

Tearing herself loose, she scampered on bare soles across the cracking floorboard, through the door into the library. Then all was silent.

Hastily he jumped out of bed, followed the shadow. A slender figure appeared in the doorway just then, swung over the parapet of the basement. The ivy on the wooden columns rustled. Downstairs, running footsteps sounded... Who was that?

“Sylvana!” he called out into the night. Soft laughter answered. Then all was silent. He went to the desk, struck fire and lit the lamp.

“Little Witch!” he muttered, looking around, “Forest Witch!”

Then he saw what the night’s visit had been for. The green cardboard box that contained his uncle’s laudanum pills was gone. Stolen. And he himself had left the door to the basement open. So the child had climbed up the wooden pillars and left the house in the same way. There wasn’t much to it, and he would have laughed at other times. But the conversation with the Rose innkeeper was still with him. The man could not get over what he had done, he could see that.

It was only when he was lying in bed again that the frightening possibility occurred to him that the sweet tooth could eat the poison after the manner of a child. But he had told her that there was poison in the box, so she had been warned.

After a night of wild dreams, he made his way to the inn.

As he entered the tile-paved hallway, the barmaid met him with teary eyes, her left cheek swollen red. In the drinking room Christian was alone. His pipe smoked, his eyes looked stubborn. A half-emptied measure of wine stood before him.

“Now order has been restored here,” he said after Peter’s greeting, “I have dusted off the rags and the women will still feel my hand. A few muzzles will drive out the fornicator, don’t you think? Now sit down and have a drink!”

He laughed dreadfully, and with an all too hasty movement of his arm threw the beautiful cut glass with the silver coin in the foot off the table, so that it shattered and the wine flowed along the floorboard in a little red stream.

“Did you go too?” he laughed, kicking at the shards. “My grandfather who drank from you and my father are also long gone. There is nothing left.”

Wait, Herr... You shall not die of thirst on my account.”

He rose staggering. Wine haze wafted toward Peter. Unpleasantly touched, Storck left after a few words. There was no talking to the drunk. He seemed to have found comfort in the excess of wine.

“Stay here!” the innkeeper shouted after him.

Outside, Peter ran into Hornauss on the street, who stopped him and swore, without being asked, that it was time for him to stop wandering

around. The cattle, the household goods would fall into ruins. A peasant is not a soldier. It was once enough, and as for him, Teimer could talk now, as much as he wanted. He, Hornauss, would no longer go along. Tomorrow he would be up here again, the Klagenfurt tobacco merchant, the cursed Teimer, who couldn't get enough.

And Sandwirt, who took away the honest spoils of war from the people, was really the right one! Peter broke away from the enraged man, and looked into the desolate forge of Fentor, where no fire had burned for a long time and rust lay on the anvil.

But at the last house of the village his heart stopped. Julia strode towards him and smiled. Beside her walked in stooped, almost submissive posture old Rangger Blasi, the pitch collector, in his shiny black armored jacket.

"You are getting out of your home so late?" she said kindly, her beautiful voice sounding like violin tones. "We've been in the woods already, old Blasi and I."

The pitch collector grinned.

"The black pines sweated out a butt load of pitch," he grumbled.

"Too bad you weren't with us. It was so beautiful up there. But I guess you're a late riser?" the girl smiled at Peter.

He became embarrassed with joy that she was so kind to him. And yet he did not dare to look at her for long, afraid that the idea of the wonderful body, which he saw without a cover, would rob him of all control. Only awkwardly he brought out the request to want to communicate with him in the future, once his company was pleasant. And he very much hoped that the old man with his clanking, sharp-smelling pitch coat would generally troll himself.

But to his pain, the opposite occurred. Julia suddenly blushed under his shy gaze, bowed her head in greeting with the heavy tresses, and left him standing there, resuming her eager, half-loud conversation with Blasi. The dismayed man had no choice but to continue his aimless walk in the opposite direction.

And in doing so, it was clear to him that he had fallen deeply in love, that for the time being there was no redemption. Had not everything else become indifferent to him? Hardly once had he thought of Federspiel's strange discovery, of the wanderer who was in the midst of the familiar chamois in the inaccessible cauldron of evergreen trees. Even the fate of the

Rose innkeeper, which had struck him so deeply yesterday, now seemed less important to him. The tragedy of the bravely and certainly futilely fighting people did not move him much at this hour. Yes, even Vienna, after whose joyful abundance of light and cheerful people he had longed for so many times in the beginning, had become a pale memory image. And his dead uncle, whose mysterious end demanded atonement, he had almost forgotten.

But she had blushed under his gaze! What bliss lay in this realization! She was no longer indifferent to him; she was perhaps only struggling with her bitter pride. What did he care about anything else? His place was where his beloved's little feet touched the earth, where the breath of her heart-shaped red Mouth mingled with the air. The lung-sick Federspiel might send him Anderl ten times and tell him that the gamecock was crowing and dancing on top of the clearing. And the poor peasant girl who threw herself at him....

In blissful thoughts he went on. Over the sky, which had been so clear yesterday, frayed feathery clouds were moving, the harbingers of coming rain. On the Hockauf a darker cloud was stranded and sat gloomily.

Bright red it lay on the path. He bent down; they were flowers, shaped like oversized alpine roses, resplendent in royal purple. He had never seen the like. Dark green, elongated leaves gave the background to this splendor. Where did this freshly broken twig come from, which must have been grown in a greenhouse with other overseas and precious blossoms, to come here on this wretched stony path, at a height that allowed only the humblest and hardiest of plants a meager growth?

He walked back toward the village, raptly gazing at the magnificent calyxes. Thick sticky drops hung from the slender dark leaves of the branches.

Involuntarily he tasted the juice. It tasted sweet and pleasant like honey.

When he looked up again, he noticed the pitch collector, on his stiff old legs, hastening back the way he had walked by Julia's side, sometimes bent down searching, also searching the grass to the side with his hands, as if he had lost something. Following an intuition, Peter quickly hid the flower find in his pocket.

"What are you looking for, Blasi?" he called to the old man. The latter's face settled into a thousand wrinkles and folds.

“A medicinal herb, a rare one, I lost, around here...” murmured the glittering one, his gaze lingering greedily on Peter’s bulging coattail.

“Well, well!” replied Peter coolly. “Perhaps further out.”

Rangger squinted at him venomously, got a coughing fit that rattled his pitch crusted, nodded at Peter’s pocket, and said, “I suppose it will be in vain to look.”

‘But still he went on, peering everywhere. It was strange, after all, how eagerly the person searched for the flower.

“I hope you will find what you have lost!” exclaimed Peter after him, not without mockery. But the hunched, laboriously trudging man only made an angry gesture with his hand and gave no more answer. Peter walked straight to Federspiel. The hunter lay on his bed and smoked, despite the coughing jerks that from time to time shook his sunken chest. The small room was decorated with all kinds of antlers, the pelt of a bear laid spread, with armed paws and chunky skull on the stone floor.

When the visitor entered, Seraphim jumped from the bed with a mighty swing and looked surprised when he saw the strange flower in Peter’s hand.

“Do you know this?” He asked.

The hunter gently took the beautiful flower with two fingers, smelled it, bit a piece of the green leaf and then shook his head. “In all my days I have never seen such a beautiful flower! Where did it come from?”

“It must be from here!” exclaimed Peter. “It is located on the way to the Hockauf, not far from Sankt Marein.”

Federspiel looked attentively at the plant, thinking hard.

“Nevertheless, the plant is not from here,” he said firmly. “I know every plant that grows here in a wide radius and bears flowers. I certainly wouldn’t have missed that one. Nobody passes by such beautiful red flowers.”

Peter slapped his forehead.

“Sylvana! Sylvana once wore such a flower in her hair...”

Federspiel moved his head doubtfully, looked at the flower from all sides, and then put it on the table.

“You must be mistaken. This flower certainly comes from the south. Perhaps someone lost it, who in turn got it from someone in Bolzano or Merano.”

Something prevented Peter from speaking of Julia, though the thought grew more and more fixed in his mind that it was she who had lost the



branch and sent the old man back to look for it. Perhaps there was a place after all; hidden in the forest like that miraculous spring where the glorious blossom grew, and Julia and Sylvana knew about it. For the longer he thought, the more it became clear to him that he was not mistaken in thinking his find was a blossom of the same genus to which the flower in the charcoal-burner's child's hair had belonged.

"I already know how we will find out exactly," exclaimed the hunter, snapping his fingers. "Tomorrow, after all, Teimer is to come up; he has sent his messengers to the South Tyrol. But in Bolzano lives young Josef von Giovanelli, who knows every little plant, even if it grows behind the sea. Send him the branch, and he will determine it. A little wet moss will probably keep the flower reasonably fresh."

And Peter immediately sat down and wrote a polite letter to the plant expert.

When he had finished, he suddenly felt awkward and clumsy. Hadn't he just had the best opportunity to visit Julia? What did he care, after all, about the learned name of the plant whose blossoms lay here on the table? It was a thousand times wiser to immediately go to the beautiful girl in the blacksmith's house and hand her the lost flowers with a decent apology. Had not even his color brother Stepf in Würzburg given a beautiful stranger who lived in the inn a little handkerchief, which he had moreover cunningly bought, as having been lost by her, and thus managed to make her sit down and talk to him in the nicest way. Who knows how far this graceful, so cleverly achieved adventure would have gone, had not the driver of the extra mail coach, with which she was to travel, sneezed admonishingly outside the window and thus put an end to the young man's hopes?

"I will keep the smaller twig," he cried hastily, quickly unwrapping it from the damp cloth the hunter had prepared.

With a beating heart, he strode toward the blacksmith's house. What was the motto of the Franconian League? "*Fortuna, virtutis comes.*" – The hearty is guided by fortune.

But before the door of the hostile house, his courage almost fell away. It was, after all, a daring move, and it remained uncertain how she would receive his intrusion. The visit of a young man in the parlor of a girl of family.... that almost bordered on sacrilege. But here, where they were both, as it were, alone among people whose judgment was not to be valued in

matters of finer manners! - No, it had to happen. Never again, perhaps, was there such a favor of fate.

But when he stepped into the empty corridor of the blacksmith's house, keeping a careful lookout, a tremor seized him. Like poison, the memory of the forest spring stirred in his blood.

His blood was suddenly stripped of all chaste fragrance. How, if bold carriage took him farther in one stroke than he had hitherto dreamed? She was after all only a woman, and her white skin was flushed under his gaze. Were there not also in her, unacknowledged perhaps, but nevertheless awaken able, secret desires, which resembled his? It flickered before his eyes. No hesitation! The day of happiness had dawned!

No one seemed to be in the deserted house. Steep and narrow, with deeply trodden wooden steps, a staircase led upward, to a cobwebbed, dimly lit tiny window. The wood groaned under his hesitant tread. Now he was upstairs and standing in the hallway. Two doors were there. One was half open and let see the stairs to the kitchen. The other... His breathing was heavy, tingling heat rose to the roots of his hair.

He knocked. No answer came. Slowly he pressed the handle. The door burst open with a creak.

The room was empty. He looked around disappointed. On the table, in a blue-glass earthenware jug stood a whole bunch of those wonderful unknown flowers shining like dark red flames. A strangely shaped gold shining headband lay beside it, over the chair hung a soft white robe. A narrow bed stood in a vaulted alcove. The completely unadorned room seemed austere and meager to him.

But a terrible shock ran through him. The flower he had brought with him slipped from his hand. Something rumbled up the stairs with a roar, blowing angry breaths from itself like a bull. Before Peter stood huge and black Gervas Fentor, and the monstrous hairy paw held a thick iron bar. He must have come home yesterday, and now from the window of the inn he had seen the hated one enter his house.

"Little fellow!" he gasped. "Now you are mine!"

The terrible rod lifted to strike. Peter read in the bloodshot eyeballs the murderous will, with his right hand he grasped the arm that threatened his unprotected head, smelled the stench of ashes and smoke that surrounded the frenzied man.

"It's a matter of life!" - he thought.

The next moment he flew to the wall, dodging a blow. Plaster flakes splashed under the errant blow so that the wall cracked.

Then a voice called out, Julia's voice, a word in a foreign language. The blacksmith's mouth remained open, something like dismay painted itself on his face, and the hand with the clumsy weapon sank down.

The beautiful girl stood pale and tall before the two.

Peter looked at her, moved his lips. He wanted to explain, but no word came out of his mouth. In her eyes there was fear and love, but also an angry sparkle. Silently he pointed with his hand to the flower that the blacksmith's shoe of nails had crushed.

"Go... go at once!" she cried, and tears came to her eyes.

Outstretched hand pointed to the stairs. He bowed his head and took a few steps.

"I just wanted to bring the flower that I found on your way!" he said.

A dull hum told him that the danger was not yet over. Defiance rose in him. Should he show the blacksmith his back? Flee in the presence of his beloved?

Then she raised her hands pleadingly.

"Why don't you go... for my sake...!"

Sobbing fear was in her voice. He went at once, descended the stairs. It was to him as if he was burdened with indelible shame.

But she had been afraid for him, she, the pure one....

When he was at home, all alone in his room, he suddenly had to cry like a child. She would never be his. Dark, sinister forces were watching over her, determined her actions, and threatened anyone who wanted to get close to her. But who, who was it? And what was she?

## SECTION THIRTEEN

The next day was again unfriendly, cold weather. Teimer had come, as Christian and Federspiel had predicted, but not alone. Father Archangelus had come up with him, and Voglsanger went with the messenger stick from house to house and invited the men to the Helmoos.

Silently they gathered, the few who had returned. Lergepohrer, Hornauss, Fentor, Voglsanger and a few more. The others were old men, already turned to the earth, tired from the hard work of a long life and partly plagued by brokenness.

It looked different on the moss than on the day of the first enthusiasm. Many women had gathered, staring in horror at the new disaster. An old man beat the badly stretched, rattling drum, a single cross pipe whistled garishly and falsely. The innkeeper of the Rose, looking dilapidated and ill, staggered to the drummer and asked him to stop. Then the playing also fell silent.

Saddened, the drummer looked at the people standing around him. He was haggard from sleeplessness and tired from traveling. Only in his eyes glowed the old fire, the strong will of a whole man. With downcast eyes, smiling to himself, the red-bearded Capuchin priest stood with him.

Once again the cross pipe cried out, an ugly sound. Peter winced... Words came to his mind:

After my pipe  
They are all dead  
The last row...

Horror ran icy over his back, made his teeth chatter. A voice sounded like a trumpet. The monk suddenly stood on the tree stump from which Teimer had once spoken. Today he was silent and looked around worriedly. Now the Capuchin raised his arms so high that they stretched out of the wide sleeves of his robe like knitting needles. His powerful voice flew over the square, captivating everyone....

“What do I see?” he shouted overpoweringly loud, causing many to cringe. “What do I see? Resentment in all faces, unwillingness to argue, fear for dear life. And what do I not see? I do not see the ardent zeal to sacrifice oneself for God and the holy religion. Yes, you go ahead, some think, I will not give up my dear maggot sack; however certain it is of decay, before the time. I have house and farm, children and cattle. What do I care? If only I can get my skin off, slut around and lie on top of the peasant’s wife. Oh fie! Fie! You want to be Catholic Christians?”

One of them laughed.

“Were you sent up by the gentlemen, Pfaff?” he shouted in the middle of the sermon. “Then tell them that we are not as stupid as we were a month ago. Be it all rags, parsons, and gentlemen together!”

Silent silence followed the call. Only one woman shrieked in horror. The Capuchin cast a fearful glance at the adversary.

“That’s right!” He clapped his palms together as if in mad joy. “Good boy! That’s the way to talk. Do you hear him, Satan? Do you hear how he speaks gall and filth against the Priest of the Lord? Wretched man, you who stoop to be his vessel! Do not hide behind the tree! I know you well, false Simon from Pfunds. Know that your conscience will drive you to me this very day, your conscience, which already sees the flames of pitch and brimstone blazing which your physical eye cannot yet perceive. O how you will plead and whine that I may take away the terrible sin from you! Expect me, Simon, after this meeting!” Alone and deathly pale stood the just now bold caller, shyly shunned by the others who moved away from him, forming an open space between himself and the sacrilegious one. Horrified, he stared at the Father. The latter indifferently pulled the blue sackcloth from his habit, blew his nose and continued in his sermon.

“Now to you, good marksmen and defenders of the fatherland! Do not be deceived by the deluded brother. You all know that everyone who has to give his life for the holy cause will rise to heaven with a candle. Oh what a good bargain such a one makes! A life that means only a miserable drop of time, a life full of plague, poverty, sorrow, pestilence, crop failure, cattle death, misery and suffering he exchanges for the whole, great, golden Heavenly bliss for all eternity, for an everlasting, infinite joy, which no human tongue can describe. Oh you good businessman, You who exchange a handful of worm food for a sack full of gold and precious stones! Do not hesitate; conclude your business with the divine Savior! If he graciously

gives you the life you sacrificed to him, whoopee! - the heavenly reward will not escape you, and you will have won twice over. For the Lord God keeps his promise and needs no scripture!

So hear me then: Tomorrow our Andrä Hofer will come with his faithful. Who is this Andrä Hofer? An innkeeper. What does such an innkeeper understand? You ask me. Well, an innkeeper knows very well how to keep uninvited guests out of a Christian house. He knows how to serve everyone the drink that is due to him, he can calculate what is due to each person. He knows how to calculate and does not start anything that does not yield a profit. You can trust this landlord in particular. For with him is God and the holy virgin, with him are the blessed priests who suffered martyrdom, with him are the souls of the innocent children who fell victim to the Bavarian scoundrels.”

Loud sobbing from the women interrupted him.

“Oh holy tears!” he exclaimed. “Oh precious wet! Weep you, beloved. Soon you will be allowed to rejoice.

Therefore up and away, you men! Down into the valley and towards the Hofer, towards Innsbruck. The angels of the Lord will be at your side with silver lances and golden swords. The rosy blood of the Lord Jesus will stand by you against the hosts of hell. Think of all the suffering to you and your countrymen, to women and virgins, to the old and the weak, to children in the cradle, to innocent cattle, and your hands will be like iron tongs, your fists like blacksmith’s hammers, and your shots like lightning. Drive into the devilish brood with pitchforks, scythes, maces and grisly axes! Let your guns crack against them, so that the saints rejoice in heaven! Out of the land, into the dust with the heathen, whored, filthy lot! For God, Emperor and Fatherland! - Once more and for the last time!”

A frenzied shouting and whooping showed how much the words had ignited. The women shook off their fear and cheered most madly. Many kissed the Father’s emaciated hand. Teimer smiled with satisfaction, dividing the old and young shooters.

Simon Falschlunger also slowly crept up. “Reverend Father,” he stammered. “Forgive me...”

The Capuchin smiled. “Next time, you’d better trump that infernal pig-tail,” he said mildly, holding out his hand for the contrite to kiss.

“And get yourself sorted out right away! That’s the best penance!”

Peter walked away unnoticed. Federspiel had remained invisible.

‘The next day Teimer came to him and promised to give the packet of flowers and the letter to the gentleman from Giovanelli. He drank a glass of wine in the Zeitlanghof and looked inquiringly at Peter several times. At last it burst out of him.

“I beg your pardon!” he said, not without quiet disdain, “but you look to me as if you could quite well carry a rifle as far as Innsbruck.”

The blood rose to Peter’s head.

“My uncle disappeared here,” he retorted, “I must know what happened to him.”

“Is that your only reason?” asked the tobacco merchant mockingly.

“No, Herr Teimer.” Peter looked him full in the face. “To you, as one educated and understanding, I will say what keeps me. I studied in Würzburg, come from a Franconian family. That is the reason that keeps me from fencing against Bavarians.”

The other nodded.

“And a Viennese by the way; I know the Viennese well. They always let us down. The emperor, too, keeps himself in the background; just have the Archduke Johann write letters to the Tyrolean’s. If it turns out well, he thinks, then I’ve done my part; if it doesn’t, then I didn’t know about the deal. I would be ashamed in your place, Herr Storck.”

“You are my guest, Herr Teimer.” Peter stood up. “And therefore...”

“Knows well. I’m a coarse Tyrolean.” He buttoned the shabby over coat. “But I will give you one piece of advice: don’t tell anyone but me that you are of foreign origin. It could end badly for you.”

He shrugged and turned to go. He looked tired and worn out, as he stooped his back toward the door. Peter felt sorry for the brave man.

“Herr Teimer!” he exclaimed, “do not misjudge me altogether. Believe me that I wish you and your countrymen victory with all my heart. My heart also beats for the cause of freedom!”

The peasant leader turned to look at him once more.

“Freedom?” he said, and the corners of his mouth twitched. “There is probably still a long way to go before we get there, even if we win. If you wanted to put it exactly, it should be: we’re fighting for our old customs. And that’s a fine fight, too. There - take my hand! I am not set to judge you.”

“Farewell! And once again, may it end well!”

“God grant you’re right!” the other murmured between doors. “The bad thing is, people don’t want to be right anymore. They’re tired of fighting. I know it, even if Hofer believes that things still have their old power and strength. But Kolb, who belongs in the fool tower, and the foxy Haspinger Sandwirt, they confuse the minds of the honest simple-minded men, with their chatter and plotting. There are too many cooks in the soup and the capable ones, the Crown Innkeeper from Hall and Speckbacher, cannot stop and save anything on their own. That’s the way it has to be, the way it goes. No hard feelings, and thanks for the cool drink.”

He went out.

“He, too, is afraid,” thought Peter. “He doesn’t think much differently from Serafin Federspiel.”

And then he sank into grief that he did not succeed in seeing Julia. But with uneasiness he was disturbed by the thought of the little regard that Teimer had for him, in spite of the cool friendliness of his parting. And inwardly he could not conceal from himself that he understood the brave man who was engaged in grueling and perilous labor for his people. Was he allowed to confess himself before him as a friend of those Bavarians who had suffered so terribly in Schwaz? Were they Federspiel’s German brothers who did no differently than the Frenchman? Oh, it was all so sad, one hardly knew anymore what was right and what was wrong. This slaughter of human beings was terrible. This horrible torment of a good and honorable people, who held on to the natural right to decide for themselves which nation they belonged to.

To all this was added the completely changed behavior of Notburga, who studiously avoided him and hardly gave an ‘answer’ to questions concerning the finances. This untenable relationship also required an unpleasant correction. It could not remain like this. Even the dog, which he had actually saved and had shown itself so grateful, had become disloyal to him and only stayed downstairs with the girl, as if he wanted to show how much he disapproved of his master’s behavior.

Peter’s dejection was not transformed into a more uplifted mood even by the incoming reports of victory. And yet it was joyful news that came up from the valley. Hofer was more capable than many people thought. He had found everyone on the other side of the Brenner, old and young. The Upper Inn Valley folk arrived at Schönberg on the twenty-ninth of May. The displeasure that had taken hold of them gave way in the face of the fiercely



hated enemy, and with great enthusiasm they entered the fray. Thus the second battle on Mount Isel was also a happy one. Admittedly it was over. No matter how much Teimer begged, ordered, scolded and cursed, the Bavarians, who were leaving in a most disorderly manner, remained unmolested. Only a few men gathered for the pursuit, and when the indefatigable tobacco merchant left them for a short time to raise reinforcements, they scattered. Tyrol was probably temporarily free, but constantly threatened, in addition miserable and impoverished. The officials and teachers were starving, hordes of beggars roamed threateningly.

The militia who returned to Sankt Marein again scolded Zangerl, who tried to prevent the raids into Bavaria. There was a murderous quarrel with the Vorarlbergers, who were celebrating the victory at Hohenems and did not want to accept the Battle of the Isel. Rumors, spread by the half-crazy Kolb flew like whimsical colorful birds over the Brenner. After that, four thousand captured Austrians had broken out in Mantua, the Archduke Johann approached with a huge army; in the battle of Wagram, there was a great victory. Napoleon had both legs crushed by a twelve-pounder bullet. That was it. Cannons had to be had. Oak trunks were cut, drilled out, and shod with iron hoops. One spiked maces, sharpened bent scythes and cast bullets from window lead. Nothing else happened.

It was now often the case that Peter and especially Federspiel were called nasty names when they showed themselves. For this reason alone Peter avoided going down the path, preferring to go up into the Damned Forest, where at least he was alone.

Once he saw Julia passing by from the balcony and almost became sick with burning love. He ran down, hatless, up the steep path. But she had already disappeared. He tried to catch up with her, but there was something to stop him. At the wayside shrine sat the wanderer, the old man he had met on his first ascent to Sankt Marein. The old man did not seem to be shy of him.

The old man looked strange enough. He wore a round leather hood, over which ran crosswise brackets of bright iron, and a short scarlet coat, which covered his upper body. His gaze rested half-sneeringly, half-puzzlingly on Peter. Again the young man was overcome by that indescribably disquieting feeling, which was composed of aversion and attraction. In the sharply cut pale face of the old man there was something that touched him with incomprehensible force at the same time. Was this

mute old man laughing at him, or was there not a ray of kindness shining in those evil-looking eyes? Why did this strangely spruced-up, aged man step into his path again, why did he look at him so challengingly or compassionately? Why others saw the strange man only from a distance, while he stepped into his path for the second time? A sudden, irresistible desire turned Peter to drive this mute, petrified man to a human expression, to see him angry or cowardly, just anything other than this rigid, inexorable mask that was natural, good or evil, all one.

He stopped, crossed his arms over his chest and looked challengingly at the motionless man sitting there. But the narrow mouth did not open; the fixed eyes under the white brows betrayed nothing of what was going on behind the high brow, unless complete disregard spoke from them. What would happen if this gloating old ghost were grabbed by the shoulder and rudely shaken? Maybe the old man would get angry, perhaps he would scream, jump up... But it would be impossible for him to remain in this insulting indifference. Everything in Peter urged for a discharge, for a quarrel, for raging shouting. With angry eyes he took a step toward the seated man. But then the old man with a calm movement reached for something he was carrying under his coat, pulled it out and laid it across his knees, ready to hand and flashing. Peter saw clearly that it was a short sword, whose hilt was clasped by the scrawny, sinewy hand. The look threatened mischief.

Then Peter laughed and measured the silent man from top to bottom.

A madman sat there by the path. That was as clear as day. What kind of man wore a red coat and a short sword? Grim merriment befell him.

“Excuse me, Herr Julius Caesar,” he said with a bow. “I didn’t mean to interrupt!”

The old man did not move, only looked at him as if ready to leap.

A chill feeling made Peter shiver. Without looking back, he walked on. This sinister man did not look as if he understood jest. And yet there was something in the old wrinkled face, something intangible that awakened memories that lay deeply buried, a resemblance to someone he had known in Würzburg or in Vienna... a long time ago. What was it?

He turned around once more. The redcoat was still sitting there, unchanged, unmoving, the bare sword on his knees. A ghost from... yes, from the Roman times. Quickly Peter went on.

In the coal yard, the son was building a new pile. A cowbell rang to the squealing of a child and the scolding of a woman, further up in the forest. Sylvana sat not far from the nascent elaborate woodpile, brushing her hair. She looked at him briefly, and then turned her back. She was probably feeling guilty, thinking of the nighttime entry into the Zeitlang yard and the stolen box. God knows what she had done with the pills. In any case, his fears had been groundless.

“Hey, Sylvana!” he shouted.

“Go away, stupid human!” the brother shouted roughly. “Do you want the master to run after you?”

She stood up and hesitantly came closer.

“What do you want me for?” she asked, her mouth twisting defiantly.

“What did you do with the pills that were in the green box?” he inquired sternly.

She looked at him defiantly and laughed.

“Me? What do I care about the box? After all, you didn’t give it to me.”

“You took it for that then... By night!” he threatened.

“Someone else might. Not me,” she said flippantly.

He caught her wrist and twisted it a little, “Will you tell the truth?”

But he immediately let her go when he felt her teeth.

Plaintively, she rubbed the reddened joint.

“You can be rough.”

Sulking, she turned away.

He realized that with kindness he was more likely to learn something.

“Listen Sylvana..., you won’t want to deny that you were with me. You kissed me...” he added more quietly. “That night, in the Zeitlanghof...”

“I was never in the Zeitlanghof, and now leave me alone. I haven’t got your box either...”

She was unmistakably speaking the truth.

“You weren’t with me?” he asked, astonished.

“Who?”

She shrugged and smiled.

“Who could it have been?” he said more to himself.

“Someone else, that’s who.” She made a scornful face. “One you like better.”

“She may be lying after all,” he thought. “And she’ll never admit it. Maybe if I promise her something...”

“Sylvana,” he cajoled, “if you tell me the truth, I’ll give you something nice. You can come to me, I have many beautiful things.”

Her eyes immediately became big and round, she threw back her dark reddish hair with a hasty movement and jumped towards him.

“It wasn’t me, you can you can believe me,” she cried, looking at him sincerely. “That’s all I can say...”

“Do you know who did it?” he pressed her again.

“I don’t. So it was someone else who kissed you.”

His thoughts circled. Notburga? She didn’t climb pillars, had never had the desire for the silly box. Julia? Unthinkable. Who on earth had been with him?

“If I am to come to you,” she babbled rapidly, “you must tie up the dog. I am afraid of the dog, for he knows me well. He smells that I am from the coal yard and bites me. You can go with me into the juniper bushes now.”

Mischievously, she rubbed her chest against him, tickling his hollow hand. A little blue-spotted cloth peeked out of his pocket, which she quickly pulled out and stuffed into the neckline of her shirt.

“So I come...you...!”

“Sylvana!” cried the harsh voice of her mother up in the forest. “Drive the cow in!”

She immediately hopped away, swinging the little cloth, looking back with a laugh.

“I’m coming!” she shouted once more.

In deep thought, Peter strode back along the path. Who had it been? Who had kissed him so softly?

The wanderer was no longer sitting in his place. A hooded crow, gray and black, flew up with a hoarse cry, fluttered to the nearest treetop, and looked with a crooked head at the man who was talking to himself.

“I’m going crazy...”

A surprise awaited him in the Zeitlanghof. In the hallway stood Notburga in her holiday costume, her broad straw hat on her golden hair, holding a large bundle in both hands in front of her.

“Farewell,” she said without further introduction, letting the bundle slide to the floor and holding out her hand to him.

“What is this?” he cried, startled, grasping her arm. “You want to go away, Notburga? Why, why?”

She lowered her eyes. “Soon it will be seen!”

“So they shall see!” he exclaimed in a sudden flush. “Stay here, Notburga, as my...” - ‘Woman’ he almost said, but the word would not come out.

She smiled wistfully, “Isn’t it so, now you would soon have married me?” she said, and her cheeks flamed. “That would only be a misfortune for both of us, for you are a gentleman and will need another one day. Perhaps you would do it and take me with you to the great city of Vienna out of a good heart. You would soon repent of that and you know very well that I am right. Things are the way they are, and you can’t help me. I don’t want to stay with my brother either.

He talks in such a way that I get scared and afraid, and so I set out and wander in God’s name to my old mother in Engadin, so that she can help me in my difficult hour. When the child is here, I will send you a message.”

A forlorn smile crossed her face.

“No!” he cried, holding her close. “I won’t let you go like this. Come up, I must speak to you in earnest.”

She braced herself against his grasp, broke free.

“It is once decided and remains so,” she said firmly. “Christian...I suppose my heart aches deeply that I must leave him in his misery. But even if I wanted to stay, he’s only responding to a single voice that’s in him, and he doesn’t know me at all.”

“But why today? So soon, Notburga, without your having spoken a word before?” he pushed her.

She looked him full in the face, and a sore anger was in her look.

“Want to know?”

“Yes!” he cried, affected by her tone.

Her voice quivered strangely.

“That you took the wreath from me and then kept another in your bed, that’s what. It has grievously affected me that you should be bad...”

A single tear ran down her cheek. Quickly she wiped it away and said harshly, “I’m not crying for you.”

“Another?” Peter shook his head slowly. “Never has another slept with me...”

She laughed harshly. “Chicks let their hair down.” Her mouth narrowed, her eyes flashed. “And cats climb into open windows at night.”

“I don’t understand you, Notburga...”

“There was a long hair on your pillow.... in the morning after the same night, when my brother came back, a woman’s hair...”

“It can only have fallen from your head, Notburga.”

“So my light hair turned black that night and light again the next morning. And at the same time I have lain upstairs in your arms and at the same time I cried downstairs in the chamber over my poor little child... Farewell! It is not different, and much talking does not make it better!”

She picked up her bundle, left him standing there and went away.

He heard her firm step outside in the gravel of the path. Stunned, he stood there and only after a while did he remember that the dog had run after Notburga.

“Spirit!” he cried, “Spirit! Come to me!”

The dog might have already been out on the road. But at his master’s call he chased back once more, stopped in the middle of the garden path with his head tilted and looked at Peter.

“Spirit! Come nicely! Come to me, my dog!” he cried as if in great fear.

Then the black dog, which he had saved from the charcoal burner’s knife, uttered a short, pitiful howl, listened for a moment to the echoing footsteps of Notburga, looked once more at his master, and then ran in long leaps after the disappeared woman.

Peter waited a while, feeling it rise hot in his eyes, and then walked slowly toward the house. Death on the wall whistled to him, tapping the beat with his fan shoe, grinned over his cross pipe....

Farewell! The dog had also left him. Only after a while he noticed that an old woman was standing next to him.

“I am Bärreiter Hirlanda,” she mumbled with a toothless mouth. “The Lergetpohrer girl has told me to be at the master’s hand, if it’s all right with him.”

“For my sake,” said Peter bluntly.

He showed the old woman the kitchen and chamber, briefly told her what she had to do, and then went downstairs grief-stricken.

It had probably not been love that he had felt for Notburga. But that she had left him like that hurt him, and there was a stone in his heart called guilt and was bitterly heavy.

He was more disgusted with the house than ever, and so he entered the drinking room of the Rose Inn.

Behind the table sat no one but Christian alone, glowing red in the face and letting a long gulp of red wine run down his throat.

“Notburga is gone,” said Peter, dropping heavily into an armchair.

The Rose host seemed not to have understood him and smiled mysteriously.

“Teimer will be wild, because I didn’t come to him,” he whispered. “But the boy, you know, the same drummer that I shot down at the Husselhof, said I should stay at home. He’s so sweet, the little boy, with his blond hair, and his tender little feet have become sore and aching in the army boots.”

He grabbed Peter by the sleeve and pulled him towards him.

“Every night...”

A gulp came over him, his eyes became fixed, and a gurgling sound came out of his mouth.

“He comes and sits on my bed. And though it’s dark night, around him it’s all light. Bleeding, now, bleeding from the little hole I shot in his head. He’s quite well, you wouldn’t believe it. Only cold, he is cold in the unconsecrated earth. At Sonnenburg, he says, they buried him there. I should take him out of the ground and bring him to the graveyard. But when he comes out of the ground like that... Jesus, Mary!”

Thick beads of sweat stood on his forehead. He stared at the half-empty jar, slurring his words. Then his forehead hit the tabletop, and a rasping snore came out of his mouth.

Horrified, Peter left the room. In the evening, Federspiel came to him, ate with him some of the coarse desert that the old woman had simply put in a pan on the table.

“Lefebvre is commanding now,” said Federspiel. “They want to move in from four sides. Napoleon has sent him an order and in it there is only one sentence:

“Be cruel!”

“How do you know that?”

“A prisoner testified to it.”

For a while they sat in silence.

“Notburga is gone from here?” asked the hunter.

“Gone...”

“And her brother is sick in his mind.”

Federspiel propped his forehead in his hand.

“Because he shot the drummer. The Bavarians didn’t win, now the French are coming...”

“I don’t know if they will be much worse than our German brothers,” said Peter bitterly.

Federspiel raised his hand as if pleading.

“Don’t talk about it! Don’t talk about it! There’s a fire burning inside me, and it’s called repentance. What is one to do? For God’s sake, what is a man to do when he is astray from his most holy faith?”

“We will have to join in, Herr Serafin Federspiel,” Storck said, his lips twitching. “Especially now, when the catch-dogs of Napoleon are let loose.”

The hunter nodded and listened to the wind as it brushed plaintively around the house.

“Oh Germany, Germany!” he sighed in deepest distress. “Now it may go as it will. I can never help it.”

He shook his fist at the moon that rose above the black ridges.

“If only they would come, the French! Then I would be free from the torment of my soul. I will roll my bullets in white hat smoke so that the poison goes into their blood, when the leaden birdie scours the red spring. They shall be consumed by a lavish fire, because they stretch their claws out for German land and property. And perhaps there are some of those among them who tied me to the box tree back then...”

An insane fury shook his emaciated body; hoarse sobs came from his throat.

“I must be suffocating,” he groaned, running to the window door and yanked it open. Empty and indifferent, the round pane of gold and silver looked out at him. A terrible cough overwhelmed the hunter. Only after some time did he turn to Peter again.

“Yesterday I overheard a strange talking, up by the charcoal yard.”

His face was completely calm, his voice firm. Peter looked at him questioningly.

“I was hunting a lynx on the Haberer,” said the other, sitting down again at the table. “But he’s probably already gone over to Switzerland again. I was up there, and then I descended to the charcoal yard. There was the young woman who lives with the blacksmith...”

He interrupted himself when he saw Peter flinch slightly and smiled specially.



“I knew that would make you sit up and take notice. And besides, it’s something related to the fire spirits.”

“Julia... the young woman?” exclaimed Peter, in unwilling amazement. “Where do you get such ideas?”

But the hunter continued unperturbed.

“So Julia, Sylvana, and the coal-burner boy were sitting together in the young alders, and I was chirping because I wanted to hear what they were saying.

‘You’re just a raven, too,’ Sylvana said to her brother.

‘No more.’

He was angry and shouted against it:

‘I am a hidden man, and you are nothing, at most you may dance, because you are only a woman. The lady gave him a light blow with a whip that was in her hand, and looked at him sternly:

‘I am also a woman, Romedius.’

Then he put up his hands and said:

‘You are the sun-runner, Saint.’

Then my foot stepped on a scraggy sprig, and immediately they jumped up and ran towards the charcoal yard. What do you say to that, Herr Storck?”

“Sun runner...” stuttered Peter, strangely touched by the word, “Sun runner...”

“It’s a secret language,” nodded Federspiel. “It’s certainly the fire spirits calling each other that. So again we have a little tip in hand, know that the young woman, the boy, and the little girl have to do with the spirits...”

“It could be something else,” Peter doubted. “Some kind of game.”

“Oh, no. They were quite serious. It was awkward that the little branch lay hidden in the moss and cracked under my foot. Certainly I would have eavesdropped more.”

They talked back and forth for a long time, but the mystery did not get any brighter.

When Federspiel had gone, Peter set about the old book again, torturing himself for probably two hours until his eyes burned. And at the single page that dealt with the obsession, he remembered poor Christian, at whose bedside sat the ghost with the blue and white drum.

When he finally went to his bed, he suddenly had to laugh out loud. It had been the dog! He often jumped onto the bed, despite the scolding he received. There might have been a hair of the black animal stuck to the upholstery, the hair that had caused Notburga so much grief.

Yes, it could have been funny if there hadn't been so much sadness. After all, the dog had also gone away.

## SECTION FOURTEEN

The next morning a large part of the riflemen returned to Sankt Marein. Hornauss' hand was festering from a grazing shot; Voglsanger had received a bayonet thrust in his right thigh and smeared the wound with pitch ointment. He suffered furious pain.

Peter helped as much as he could, despite the insults that had flown at him before the march out.

Delighted and with quickly awakened gratitude, the people watched him. Even Josele, and Patscheider, said that the gentleman was right and that now they would even have an army surgeon with them when it started again. But the Bavarians would probably never come. It was over and done with. And then he remembered that Teimer had given him a letter for Herr Storck. He handed him the paper. The coat of arms seal was broken.

“Did you open the letter?” asked Peter, somewhat annoyed.

The old man scratched his white hair.

“I certainly didn't, Herr, can't read writing either. But Father Archangelus said that you can't trust gentlemen too much.”

Peter went aside and read the writing:

“Respected Herr!

The botanical rarity kindly sent to me has refreshed me in the most graceful way in the difficult sorrows for our beloved fatherland Tyrol. So much so, that in the midst of my many duties, it left me no peace until I was able to determine the species. This I did with some effort under the valuable assistance of Matthias Schöpfer, my friend, I have now succeeded. The plant has the scientific name *Rhododendron arboreum* and is native to the Himalayan mountains. In Europe, it is occasionally grown in warm houses for the sake of its splendid blooms, as for example in the Royal Greenhouse at Schönbrunn near Vienna. From there and from nowhere else the rare flower will come. Because that this tree-like plant from Hindostan could grow in our Tyrolean mountains contradicts the conditions under which alone it is able to live. It is my opinion that you, my esteemed Herr, intended by your sending to me as much a kind joke as a test of my

botanical knowledge. Also for this my thanks and this all the more, because you have enriched my herbarium in the kindest way by a precious piece. God grant that in more peaceful times I may experience the pleasure of chatting with you, esteemed Herr, about the beloved field of plant life.

I am with the most humble greetings

always willing to serve

Josef von Giovanelli.”

The letter fell out of Peter’s hand and onto the floor. Jealousy flared up in him, a consuming, poisonous pain that revealed to him in a flash the strength of his love for Juliet anew. Who else but a rich and fiery worshipper could be in a position to obtain a whole bouquet of the elusive delicious flowers from the emperor’s greenhouses in fresh condition to the Upper Inn Valley? He smiled bitterly at this thought. Well, the beautiful Julia had certainly not waited until a Herr Peter Storck from Vienna would grace her with his youthful affection. She was probably used to other things than his and, perhaps tied to a powerful man of this earth; she liked to walk in silence about the summer idyll at Sankt Marein, which after all brought some spice into the boredom of the small village. Oh, what a deluded man he had been!

Deeply ashamed and heartily unhappy, he walked down the village street, wandered sick and in a daze toward the forest that stretched below the Helmoos and gazed gloomily into the beautiful day.

His fate had become strangely confused in the remote village, where he had expected silence and a uniform course of the days. Not only had he traveled unsuspectingly into the bloody peasant uprising, with riddles upon riddles, whole shoals of dark and insoluble mysteries assailed him and made his life a chain of the most adventurous incidents.

His disappeared uncle, too, like him, might have brooded over the gloomy questions posed by inexplicable occurrences. Was there really an explanation to be found in the old silly book, which the old gentleman had kept as carefully as his last will and testament, which called Peter to the Zeitlanghof? He despaired of it.

Tired and forcibly rejecting the recurring thoughts of the beautiful girl, now alas, recognized as false, he sat down at the roadside. Then he saw before him an ant trail that narrowly crossed the human path, a real well-

trodden little army road that led the clever six-footed creatures from their high conical castle of pine needles to unknown destinations. Busy, bustling life was at his feet. The small black-brown workers dragged pieces of wood, resin grains and stalks into their realm, others hurriedly moved out, communicating in great haste with their comrades, who carried all kinds of useful things home, by feeling them. Peter took pleasure in laying small obstacles through the much used important road and, in awakening childishness, and delighted in the purposeful haste and skill with which all the nearby ants were united in their efforts to clear the road. Willingly, one little animal helped the other, put aside the small load just carried, in order to be able to help better and took it up again as soon as the road was cleared. A brown grass frog, which paused puzzled in the jump and with gold-rimmed eyes, was soon instructed by burning bites that his presence was unwelcome, and saved himself in a long leaping arc.

“Curiosity seems to be unwelcome everywhere,” said a ringing female voice at that moment.

Julia stood behind the so immersed one. A wave of happiness rushed through Peter, who jumped up, joyfully startled, and hastily tipped his hat.

“Julia!” he cried out, and then pain twitched anew over his face.

The beautiful girl looked at him meaningfully and with a white hand held out a paper to him. He recognized at once Giovanelli’s letter, which he had evidently left on the road.

He took it and said affectedly, “You have read it, demoiselle?”

“I suppose one may read something that is lying ownerless in the street,” she smiled. “Besides, the gentleman who wrote the letter seems to be a most learned plant connoisseur.”

“I wish I had never written to him,” Peter countered, looking at her. “I would have spared myself suffering.”

“I don’t understand you...”

“Now I know that someone lives in Vienna who spares no sacrifice to testify to his attentiveness to you...”

A fleeting blush crossed her face. “I don’t know anyone in Vienna...”

He listened closely.

“So these flowers were not sent to you, Demoiselle Julia?”

She looked aside and pursed her lips. “No!”

“And where did those lovely blossoms come from?”

Her face darkened.

“Herr Storck,” she said softly, “you are all too inquisitive. Is it not enough for you that I have had to protect you from the fury of the irascible blacksmith? Do you know that you were in great danger? No one would have cared much at that time if a man, in observance of his house right had slain a stranger. You don’t know the people here well enough. It is not advisable to try to intrude on their secrecy.”

He snatched her hand, drew it to his lips, and pressed a kiss to the velvety skin.

“I thank you for my life, Demoiselle Julia,” he said fervently. “Do not be angry with me. After all, I only wanted to bring you the lost flowers.”

She gently withdrew her hand from him, and there was an almost tender gleam in her eyes.

“I know it, Herr Storck. But there was curiosity in it, too.”

“I admit that,” he confessed frankly. “So many things about you are puzzling to me!”

Again a shadow flitted across her face.

“Leave things alone that don’t concern you. It is better for you.”

He was struck by the serious tone her limey voice had taken on. There was menace in the tone. Certainly she knew many things, and the hunter was probably right in associating the splendid girl with the fire spirits. The dance at the spring - wasn’t that a secret connected with the conversation overheard by Federspiel? But was it not also foolish of him to conceal what moved him? He could surely gain her trust only by full sincerity; and where there was confidence, there perhaps affection was also found. Thus he followed this feeling of the moment and told her everything he knew. Only the eavesdropping of the dance at the forest spring he kept to himself.

She listened to him attentively and silently, nodding only once when he spoke of the mysterious disappearance of his uncle Martin Storck. Otherwise no change in her regular, wonderful face betrayed astonishment or unpleasant surprise. They had sat down next to each other on the flower-covered embankment of the path, so close that he felt the warmth of her body. The noble hands lay folded in her lap, the deep dark eyes gazed into the wide expanse of the valley that flickered gold.

“I feel secrets everywhere,” he said, “they tease me, lure me. I wouldn’t have red blood in my veins if I didn’t care. The little wood witch, the elven child who calls herself Sylvana, the strange old man whom people call the wanderer...”

For the first time, she seemed excited. At least this was revealed by the voice with which she interrupted him.

“What do you want from the old man?”

“I don’t want anything from him,” he answered in amazement. “But sometimes I feel as if he were deliberately crossing my path, as if he wanted something from me for good or evil. Rather evil methinks.”

She made a violent movement.

“I think you overestimate yourself, Herr Storck. To him you are certainly no more than a gnat flying by, a whirling leaf in the wind, a floating spinning thread. The man of whom you speak stands high above all that moves us humans.”

“So you know him?”

“I know him, and I don’t want you to speak of him disrespectfully!”

Her cheeks were suddenly red, her eyes shining.

“Hurry,” he laughed with slight annoyance. “So I suppose it is God the Father himself who graces us with his temporary presence?”

Two vertical wrinkles appeared on her clear brow and displeasure trembled in her words.

“Young person! Do not commit sacrilege. If we are to be friends, give up that tone!”

Puzzled, he looked at her, had to lower his eyes from her gaze.

“I hurt you,” he relented. “I didn’t mean it...”

She answered nothing for a long time, tearing a blade of grass into small pieces and biting her lips.

“I never want to do it again...” he begged like a boy. “I didn’t know the old man was dear to you.”

She nodded and her face relaxed.

“I’m always alone,” he complained softly. “And that may well be the cause of my worrying about things that are quite properly none of my business!”

“You’re never alone,” she said, looking again into the distance of the sun.

“Never...?”

“There are always souls around us, bad and good, souls of the departed...”

The words came from her lips like a breath.

The sheet came to his mind, the incomplete record in his desk that had lain by the old book.

“They seek a shelter, the souls.”

A sudden shiver came over her.

Startled, he looked at her.

“But we have a soul in us ourselves.

“A second can live in a house,” she whispered raptly. “One can lose one’s place and be cast out.”

Startled, he grabbed her hand. It was ice cold.

“Like a fox crawling into a badger’s den when the badger hasn’t stayed home,” the paper said.

“Do you know of such a case?” he inquired, clasping the delicate hand.

A heartbreaking look met his eyes. And suddenly tears streamed down her cheeks. She freed her hand, stretched out her arms to the sun and murmured incomprehensible words. It sounded like a shattering, silent lament.

Without considering what he dared to do, he put his arm around her tender shoulders, pressed her against him in welling love. She did not withdraw from him, snuggled in his arm like a child, and opened her eyes in a shimmering gaze.... Then he kissed her on the little red mouth. A tremor ran through her limbs, and as in a dream she spoke words of a foreign tongue:

*“Eau ti tegn char, eau sunt tien!”*

Like a fervent confession it sounded. Unspeakable joy trickled through him. Again he wanted to kiss her, approached his lips to her mouth. Then a blow struck his breast.

Pale as death, she jumped up, her eyes sparkling.

“What do you dare? It is your death...”

He staggered up, confused, startled. What was this? She took a few steps, buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly. Helpless, completely shaken by her sorrow, he stood aside. But then she turned her face to him, dried her tears with a little cloth, and said in a clear voice:

“This must never happen again! Promise me!”

Saddened, he lowered his head.

“If you command it!”

The sudden pain of disappointment constricted his throat. She stepped toward him and held out her hand.



“I would like to be your friend,” she said softly and sweetly.

“But this must be forgotten forever and all, we spoke here. Your hand on it, Herr Storck!”

Wordlessly, sadly, he put his hand in hers.

“And one thing more. Do not inquire into things that must remain hidden. Must, Herr Storck! It would cause me great sorrow if something should happen to you...”

He straightened up. Was she trying to play a game with him?

“Demoiselle!” he said coolly. “I belong to a confederation of German lads that does not tolerate cowards in its ranks. I am not afraid of the guardians of the strange mysteries that dwell in these mountains. Moreover, it is my sacred duty to seek out my missing uncle and avenge him on those who caused his death. For surely he is dead. Therefore, I will follow up on the fire spirits I told you about, until I know how far they are or are not guilty of the disappearance of the noble man in whose place I am here!”

She paled at his words and made an involuntary gesture of denial. Her mouth twisted painfully.

“After all, I don’t want to torture you!” he pacified her. “I love you so much, Julia!” he groaned. “Anything that hurts you, troubles you, I will refrain from. But the uncle who appears to me nightly as a wailing shadow, him I must avenge, if he has fallen a victim to those unknown powers. You must understand that!”

“Perhaps I can help you in many things!” she said quickly, as if in a sudden resolve. “If it is possible for me, I will visit you once.”

“Really, Julia?” he cried delightedly.

“Until then,” she continued, unperturbed, “be patient! Don’t try to bring about a meeting with me yourself. Remember the rage of Gervas Fentor, the blacksmith! I cannot explain everything to you. Perhaps one time the day will come... Be patient with me, be chivalrous!”

Was it not love that shone from her eyes? The look hit him in the heart, hurt and felt good at the same time.

“I have to go away. Goodbye!” she said suddenly.

A carriage creaked on its way. He bent over her hand, kissed it reverently, on light soles she ran down the path. It was Hornauss with his team of oxen.

“Whoa!” he cried. The oxen bent their strong necks under the wooden yoke and stopped, gawking with beautiful stupid eyes and dripping mouths.

Sharp-smelling clouds came out of the small stub pipe of the peasant.

“Thank God, now there’s peace in the land for once!” he laughed merrily.

Peter walked along with him beside the groaning wooden cart and listened with half an ear to what the other was saying. His soul was full to overflowing from what he had just experienced. Yes, now it was right, laughed Hornauss, as one knew, the Archduke Johann was already on his way with a hundred thousand white coats, with cuirassiers and hussars, so that the peasants could have a rest. Had the gentleman not heard about it? But Peter was deprived of the answer, because Hornauss’ wife came from the village and shouted breathlessly to the man that this time she would not let him go out again. Not in any way. The devil could take the cursed judge Senn of Pfunds, Firlor and Sandwirt. She almost choked on her goiter, which hindered the breathing of the exhausted woman. Yes, yes, he should not look so stupid! Senn had already let the bells ring up and down the valley, even before any righteous work could be done, to summon the militias against Innsbruck. The fine ones, the lords, should set out for once, so that they too could feel what the battle was like, she added with a biting glance at Peter, and the peasants should rather help those who were on the dodge rather than those who were fattening on their sweat and blood.

In the village it was already lively. Scythes were being sharpened in the smithy, and the Zachner boy was dragging the heavy drum from the chapel. Christian Lergetpohrer stared with watery eyes at the stained fur. Women surrounded Kloiber, who had come up with satchel and rifle, scolding and complaining and held the messenger’s staff, which they wanted to snatch from him, high above his head, half laughing, half cursing.

“For God’s sake, Saxons!” he shouted at the top of his voice.

“What can I do about it? Lefebvre is marching toward Innsbruck; Beaumont is coming from the Scharnitz. The streets are swarming with lightning-blue and peasants are also joining in when they find a musket or a mace on one of them. In the fields of God they kill the women and girls, at the wayside cross they beat the Lord God’s holy hands’ and feet, in the churches they let their water run and the Corpus Christi they throw into the cesspools. With bullet scrapers and ramrods they pulled the intestines out of a peasant’s butt so that he screamed for an hour with an empty body until he died. They stripped the priests naked, flogged them with nettles, burned houses, and drove out cattle, shot down boys on the house wall so that their

brains were splattered on their father and mother. Do you want to watch? Are you Tyrolean's or what?"

"Then we'll just go again!" even old Josele Patscheider crowed. "It has to be done!"

A peddler had come up from the valley, pushing his way through the people with a chewy Jewish beard and a crooked nose, looking slyly. He had precious things in his box, little letters from St. Luke, Passau notes that make you bulletproof, toothache pills, tins of theriac, and little bottles with colorful juices. Searchingly he looked around, casually going about his business. When he saw Peter, he stumbled and then limped quickly towards him. His left foot was lumpily misshapen.

"Buy something from me, Baron," he smirked.

"I'm not a baron!" Peter rejected the importunate.

"God's wonder, and yet the gentleman looks like a count! Buy something from a poor Jew, Herr, anything!"

Peter turned away from him. The man, however, was not deterred, fastened himself to his heels, and kept on tormenting until Peter at last reached for a small knife and threw him a piece of silver.

But the Jew quite unabashedly took the little knife from his hand and gave him in exchange a poor mirror the size of his hand, set in blue cardboard.

"This fits the gentleman better," he whispered. "Your own mirror it is." He lowered his voice even more. "You have to take the glass out..."

The next moment he was back in the middle of the crowd, and the mirror had remained with Peter.

He went back to the Zeitlanghof, for it was clear to him that the man had a certain intention with this mirror. When he peeled away the holding cardboard strips from the glass, a folded piece of paper immediately fell out. Who might be sending him a message in such a way? He read the strong blocky writing:

"Herr Storch or Strock!

I have not been able to remember your name, but it may be correct as a matter of course. Immediately set off for Vienna or Munich. I mean you good. There will be an end to the rebellious peasants and what will come will not be pretty. I would be happy if you would stay with me for a while, and the beer here is damn good. I advise you well, go up and away, before the devil is set loose.

Yours sincerely, Sebastian von Pflederer, for the time being in Munich at Sendlingergassen No. 313, over three flights of stairs, next to the Silhouetten-Schroth.”

Thus the exorcised bailiff had found a means to warn him. Touched, Peter thought of the bearish face and the good-natured rumbling manner of the official who, for the sake of an hour of friendly get-together, took such pains to do him a good turn. This was a German.

Yes, it probably hurt to know that Germans stood against Germans in this dispute over the poor mountain land.

But the very next day he went with Federspiel to the meadow on the mountain and shot at the target with his uncle’s gun. If now the Frenchmen really came, then there was no reason to think about it. The gun shot well...

On the second day after the message from Herr von Pflederer, another letter came into his hands, which he, in his first flush of joy, took for a message from Julia. For a strange woman had brought it to the Zeitlanghof in his absence.

But the letter was not from Julia, was only a rough, clumsy scribble, and yet it touched the heart.

“At the beginning of my letter I kissed you deeply and you do not want to forget, it is a hard walk to the Holy Land with God’s help.

I will have great joy in my child, but it will be named after its dear father, a little girl speaks, don’t forget mine.

Notburga Lergetpohrer.”

He looked for the messenger, but she was already gone down into the valley and toward the Finstermünz Pass.

Under the heart of Notburga, a little child held in a dreamlike little hand the end of a golden thread, which went over mountain and valley, and its other end throbbed in the heart of the man.

In the evening chalk fires were blazing on the mountains. The land was in distress again. And in the stillness of the night, in the soft quiet of the four-poster bed, Peter heard softly, from very far away, a weeping sad voice, singing a well-known song, which the thick walls of the Zeitlanghof had soaked up, as the golden-haired Maid down in the chamber lamented for her little wreath.

Farewell to the good night,  
Now the end is made,  
And I must part.  
In summer the clover grows,  
In winter the snow falls,  
Then I'll be back.

## SECTION FIFTEEN

In the morning, which began with rain, Peter cleaned the beautiful rifle inlaid with gold ornamentation, found in the leather bag on the wall about fifty balls of lead turned white, cut the patches from greased leather and screwed a new flint into the cock. Sparks jumped merrily onto the pan as he pulled the trigger rehearsing. Fine powder trickled in the horn and next to the rim hung a well-sharpened hunting knife. So everything was ready for the French.

Then he went to Federspiel. When he first entered the hut, the hunter lay on his bed, but not because of moodiness. There was a worse reason to lie there, as Peter immediately realized. Just as he entered, Anderl Kinigadner took a wet cloth from the water bowl beside the bed and put it on the man's blue-red swollen right ankle, who contorted his face in grim pain.

"What happened?" asked Peter.

"It had to happen sometime, and it was a stupid thing to do. I wanted to descend from the Schellbock into the chamois garden. - Anderl, you stupid boy, you have put another Benedictus penny in the water! Well, if it makes you happy, it can't hurt!"

"You wanted to climb down?" Peter shuddered at the thought of the ghastly depth.

"Give me the pipe, boy," Federspiel beckoned to Anderl, and then held the tobacco over the pipe.

"What are you so frightened about? Didn't the old wanderer get down there? And the chamois, how do the chamois get in there? And I can't? I've already gotten into worse places than the Schellbock wall. And, by all the devils and fire spirits, I would have done it, if a rock fall hadn't come down on top of me. A big rock hit me on the ankle, so that I could only save myself with great effort and struggle. Yes, my dear!"

Excitedly, he blew the pipe smoke away from himself.

"My fingers had to hold like iron clamps and my healthy foot was crammed into a crevice. It was supposed to be my skull, but I pressed it

firmly against the wall, where a ledge was hanging out, and so it went past and only grazed my foot.”

“You say it was meant to be...?” wondered Peter.

“Certainly supposed!” the other laughed angrily, “The stones were rolled off by someone who must have gone in behind me and spied. I saw his shaggy buffalo skull up there anyway, but it was too high for me to recognize it. So while stones were still raining down I rescued myself by reaching a patch of grass on the wall, removed the sling from my neck, brought my rifle up, and pulled the trigger on the I have me, while still stones rained down I rescued it with the greatest of difficulty on a patch of grass in the wall, removed the nozzle strap from the neck, brought the rifle to bear, and pulled the trigger. But because it was only a snapshot, I missed him by a finger’s breadth, the rock splattered right next to his skull from the bullet impact, and he disappeared. He must have thought that Federspiel could hit him a second time. - Boy, put on a new rag, so that the heat eases and push Herr Storck an armchair or a chopping block to sit on.”

As Peter sat, taking the pipe with the green and rose tassels from his pocket, the hunter continued.

“For me, it’s a foregone conclusion that they have their nest down there, where Anderl and I have seen the wanderer creeping. It must be so; otherwise they would not threaten the life of a person who wants to go there. Devil of the cross, if I hadn’t burned him so fiercely, the murderous hound would have rolled over the wall with his own skull crushed! So he disappeared from my sight.”

“How did you get back here with your foot?”

The injured ankle looked horribly swollen and bloodshot.

Federspiel wanted to answer, but was seized by a cough so suffocating that he could recover only with difficulty.

“You just shouldn’t smoke!” warned Peter, pocketing his pipe.

“It won’t hurt me anymore,” the former student smiled and went on. “Believe me; I have been afraid of nothing all my life, but now I still break out in a cold sweat when I think of how I got back up there. Crawled, climbed, slid, pulled myself up with my hands, then plodded down, coughed so that the bright blood broke out of my mouth and nose, I was so tired I couldn’t get up. Then still the way back, which we have walked together, but with a sore foot! My hat lies down below, my right shoe too. The mountain jackdaws figured it out right away, how it was with me and

the ravens circled above me like over a shot chamois. I felt the red beaks of the jackdaws on my scalp, that's how cheeky they were. 'Down! Down!' was their cry! 'Eat! Eat!' They shrieked from high above. My life was worth nothing. And yet I held out, I finally got to the top. Yes, just look Anderl! I know what you're thinking. But you're wrong, you pious bastard. It was the muscles, the sinews and the will in my skull, not the scapular that you secretly sewed into my chest patch. It took me eight hours to get to the house. I climbed in at the window in the pitch dark and fell onto the bed. And was already gone like the dead. But he is not dead, said Frau Patscheider, and pulled on my foot, until it went black in front of my eyes. No ointments, she said, but cold water all the time. And She understands it better than the bather."

He drew breath and then continued:

"I asked for entrance at the charcoal yard, but the old tree-scraper, Rangger Blasi, wouldn't let me in. He grumbled and bleated like a fox digging mice, and had me sit down outside on the bench and only then rubbed my hot foot with spirit of arnica. That helped so much that I was able to continue. Inside the hut he talked to someone, whom he called 'father' and it was the wanderer. I'm sure of it. I left with a cruel pain."

'You don't have to be curious anymore, hunter,' he said. 'Next time it could end worse.'

"But I countered: 'Be happy, you rascals, when I'm together again. I'll find out what you're up to.'"

"He silently considered."

'Then you'll just have to go.'

"And that was no joke. I saw it in his eyes. But it was a torment, going home!"

He groaned and closed his eyes. But in a moment he started up.

"What did I tell you, boy?"

"That I shouldn't tell anyone anything," the young Kinigadner replied.

"And especially not to whom?"

"To... the..."

"Out with it!"

"Don't tell Father Archangelus," the lad replied hesitantly.

"Well, 'tis well."

He tried to move the sick foot, but it was too painful.

"And who rolled down the stones?" inquired Peter. "The wanderer?"



“The one with the bald skull? No, a shaggy one did it,” like I said. “The blacksmith or the charcoal burner. Maybe some other forest devil, too. It was too high and I had to look up at the bright sky. It was blinding. That’s why the shot went off to the side.”

“Let’s be glad it turned out that way,” Peter said with a deep breath.

The hunter smiled grimly, “And now more than ever,” he said. “Now I won’t rest at all. Until I have found the eyrie and the night owls in their secret lair. A drink, boy!”

Anderl held the water jug to his chapped lips. “And now I’d like to sleep!”

He closed his eyes.

Peter waved the boy out and told him to fetch wine and food at the Zeitlanghof.

“Lord!” whispered the boy.

“The Father says, in the South Tyrol, it is moving fast again everywhere. And the Bavarians are to move toward the Upper Inn Valley.”

“Why are you telling me this, Anderl?”

“Because I want to be there, too,” Anderl begged. “Would Herr Storck like to talk to the Father?”

Peter walked thoughtfully home through the rain. In the loneliness of the library he was overcome by a consuming longing for Julia. His promise forbade him to approach her, and so he had to wait, while all that she had spoken continued to resound in him like a sweet melody. If only he could have understood the strange foreign words, the plaintive exclamation she made, the love betraying sounds she spoke in his arms. Alas! Everything was dark and veiled, and nothing remained to him but the unforgettable image at the forest spring and the reverberation of her ringing voice. With a heavy heart he sat listening to the trickle of falling rain, hearing the water gurgle in the gutter and shoot off the eaves of the roof. Muffled, far away rumbled the swollen torrent.

Towards morning he thought he heard thunder claps. He jumped up, looked around confused in the pale twilight. It was still thundering. There was a wild thumping and knocking that beat against the door of the Zeitlanghof.

He jumped out of bed, dressed himself in makeshift clothes. “The French!” it went through his mind in sudden terror. He opened the window

door and stepped shivering onto the balcony. A couple of unrecognizable figures stood in front of the house and seemed to be conferring.

“What’s that down there?” he cried.

“Open the gate, Herr!” cried one whom he recognized as Voglsanger, “‘tis high time. The Death Organ must come out of the cellar hole and the blunderbusses.”

“We must go down the valley with the Death Organ!”

Peter ran down the stairs and unlocked the door. Hirlanda was shivering in her shirt and smock in the open door of her chamber.

“It’s nothing!” he called to the old woman, who was sprinkling the hallway with the drops of her tallow candle. Four or five men rushed in impetuously.

“Who are you?” Peter confronted them. “That’s no way to enter my house!”

“Open the cellar!” shouted a tall fellow. “We have no time for home gardening and idle talk!”

“Don’t shout at the Lord, Aufschnaiter!” Voglsanger rebuked him, adding, “The people are like savages already!”

“What Herr?” grumbled the audacious looking fellow. “Soon there will be no more lords in the Tyrol!”

Peter stepped close in front of the hook-nosed man and said sharply, “If you can’t keep your coarse mouth shut, I’ll show you a lord!”

A half-shy, half-defiant look met his eyes, but the pert man kept silent.

Peter let them into the cellar and descended himself. A musty stench met him. The light glowed and threatened to go out in the foul air. On wooden collars lay old heavy blunderbusses that shot egg-sized bullets. They shone, carefully greased. The twenty barrels of the organ of the dead lay in a solid frame one above the other in two rows. Thick leather pads were attached to the angular butts of the hooked rifles, as protection against recoil. A strong case, iron-clad and hard to lift even with combined forces, held the bullets. Peter took one of the bales in his hand, felt small bumps and read by the flickering light of the candle letters in the lead, which the mold had once pressed into the casting. “Drink blood,” it said.

Panting, they carried the boxes upstairs, found two more kegs of powder, greasy packets of fuses and sulfur threads, and carefully loaded everything onto the ladder wagon that was waiting in front of the Zeitlanghof.

“Where to with it?” asked Peter, stricken with a great uneasiness.

“Not far at all. To the bridge of Pontlatz!” Voglsanger answered him.

“This time it’s up to us. There are so many of them who want to play a dance for us. Whoever does not join in this time will be called a rascal and a Judas for all eternity,” he added with a meaningful look.

“Where there is a gentleman, Judas is not far away!” the hook-nosed man sneered. “Nobody knows whose worse, the lords or the Bavarians.”

“Shut your filthy sling!” Voglsanger snapped at him. “Herr Storck will not let us down. Is it true?” he asked, holding out his hand to Peter. “It is true,” said Peter and shook hands.

“So I do beg the lord’s pardon,” said Aufschnaiter in a completely changed tone, and took off his hat. “Because they said downstairs that Herr Storck keeps it with the Bavarians...”

Rattling and clanking, the heavily loaded wagon drove off. The oxen puffed and leaned into the harness. The birds began to sing, red flamed through the haze in the east.

The wind carried a ringing and roaring from the valley. All the bells cried out.

“They are upon us! It’s going arrow-deep on us right now!” it cried in Sankt Marein.

“The South Tyrolean’s can’t get through, they got stuck at Sterzing. Now it’s a matter of house and home, men and women, and whoever doesn’t defend himself will be stabbed like a pig. Think of your wife and child, don’t let it happen!”

A young woman with flying hair danced through the village alley, banged on all the windows and shouted in a cutting fistula that anyone who stayed at home today should be beaten to death like a dog.

There was no need to cheer the people on. Now that their own land was threatened, the peasants’ anger grew twice as wild. The alpine dairyman did not need to torture his tired feet. The women, in mortal fear of what was coming, preached more insistently than the Capuchin. They also wanted to come along, they shouted, and you don’t need men to carry stones.

Federspiel came along limping between two sticks. He was greeted by shouts of joy.

“You’ve found your way to us, haven’t you?” crowed old Patscheider, slapping him on the shoulder with his bony hand so that the sick man

wincing. "And Herr Storck is also better-behaved now. You both, I am so pleased!"

Pain twitched in the hunter's lean, fever-spotted face.

"It must end now," he gritted. "I'll find me a place, a nice place. Mustn't miss a shot."

"You're going along?" whispered Peter. "Now, when you could stay there quietly with your foot?"

Federspiel's face contorted.

"They have Frenchmen with them," he hissed. "They must be mine."

The drum was pumping. Peter hung the green strap of his rifle over his shoulder, letting the ball pouch and powder horn dangle on his chest. For the first time in a long time, he climbed down the path into the Inn valley. For the Zeitlanghof? Those next to him were fighting for their faith, for the emperor in Vienna, for the rotten barns, the stone-weighted poor huts, the meager cows and crab apple trees. For what did he carry his young life into battle? One word came to him which old Bartenstein once said:

"A right lad must always help the weak against the strong."

"So I will stand in honor as a Würzburg Frank," Peter said to himself. "That is reason enough!"

But already quick-footed boys were coming towards the descenders, shouting that Senn needed every hand. One should hurry.

"Help out! Help! It's upon us!"

## SECTION SIXTEEN

There, where the Inn valley slid together, steep slopes and walls rose above the white road hard by the roaring river, at the only wooden bridge for miles, the advancing enemy was to be received. Michael Senn, judge of Pfunds, had taken over the command.

The work was done with haste and zeal. High above the raging young river, which was rushing along, high above the road, which stretched between the mountain and the river, the stone batteries were laid out, held by logs on rope. The ropes sighed and whistled, so tightly were they stretched. Large, angular blocks heaped on the sloping, treeless slopes behind the roped, lying logs, head- and fist-sized chunks of stone were stowed in the gaps to form a terrible avalanche. Boys with buckets of water stood ready to tighten slackening hemp by watering it, and select, quiet men with hair-sharp hatchets were given the important places next to the ropes.

“The piper will whistle the ditty: ‘Thoughts are free.’ That means: ‘The enemy is here!’”, it went from mouth to mouth.

Close beside Peter, who was struggling to get the groaning Federspiel up to the stand, climbed Kinigadner.

“The dogs! The devils of hell!” he gasped. “I don’t need any cover. I bought a magic charm from the Jew; no lead can do me any harm!”

Dripping with sweat, exhausted, they sat on the stony ground, high up on the mountain. Just below them the road was broadly visible, next to it the gray river.

They looked into the stone batteries from above. The one below them had just been finished, artfully built on a grassy step. It was directed in such a way that the deadly load was bound to tumble into the middle of the road when the holding ropes were hewn through. In a wide semicircle squatted and lay, hidden behind stones and piles of earth, the chains of riflemen, staggered one on top of the other like stories. Over on the other side of the valley, too, a flash of sunlight caught now and then on gun barrels and brass buckles. A blood-red church flag depicting Mary with the infant Jesus lay behind Peter in the short grass. The Sankt Mareiner had taken it with them, but it was not allowed to wave. Only when the wind started to blow and to

bang, the heavy brocade could puff out in the wind as a sign of comfort for those who were destined to enter eternity at the hand of the Queen of Heaven.

The hunter was feverish and his cheeks glowed.

“You are too ill to be able to fight!” said Peter anxiously, bending over the heavy-breathing man.

“Sick already!” said Federspiel, playing with the powder horn on his chest. “Even as a young student, I spat blood, and the dog soups that my quartermaid cooked for me didn’t help against my lung disease. I only took pity on the poor dogs that were killed for my sake. Because, you know, a dog is not an animal like others, it is half a human being. And this morning, when I woke up so soon, it was bad for me... and then the foot on top of that. My God, the boy is just a boy and was completely crazy with joy that his father let him come along. Too much blood comes out when I cough, Herr Storck, that’s it. But the eye is good, and I can easily put my finger on the trigger when I see a Frenchman through the mosquitoes and grain.”

Peter looked at him sadly. There was not much life left for this young man, he well realized. And he had grown fond of him in the long loneliness.

“If I could come back, I’d like to choose a better house,” Federspiel continued. “Not one of those tall poplars, with its green leaves on the outside and is rotten and sick on the inside. But you don’t come into the world twice...” A burst of coughing interrupted him. “Because this life has been so short...”

He rested his head on his folded arms and seemed to be asleep, amidst the babble of voices, hammering and shouting.

Peter had to think of Julia’s strange words, about souls wandering homeless, and Christian came to his mind. Had he come with them? He had not seen him.

Gradually it became quieter. Everyone seemed to be lost in serious thoughts, only a few women were laughing up there and teasing each other with the boys. Peter felt the gravity of what was to come; thinking how many of the hundreds waiting for the battle would not see the next day. He looked around and saw rosaries in many hands. Manfully and ready for action, the devout let the polished beads whisper through their fingers. Their praying lips devoutly kissed the small metal crosses at the end of the cord. Others thoughtfully laid out the shooting supplies, cleaned the ignition hole of the pan with a brass needle or screwed with narrowed eyes at the

flintstone of the cock. Many, who had been working hard for hours and had done hard work, lay like Federspiel in the heavy slumber of complete exhaustion on the hard ground. Here and there one whispered earnestly to his peasant wife, who crouched beside him. Others ate bacon and bread from their satchels, chewing slowly in peasant fashion. Over on a rock outcropping, the lookouts stood upright, all alert and with dutiful attention peered down the valley. A couple of nimble fellows had taken to lurking behind the chapel on the road below. They were skilled messenger runners and messengers, and waiting high up on the mountains did not suit them.

A low, mournful singing hovered over Peter. He looked up. A few younger people in strange dark garb, whom he had never seen, were singing half aloud a melancholy song:

Up there, up there in front of the heavenly door,  
There stands a poor soul, looking sadly on.  
Poor soul mine, poor soul mine, come in to me.  
There your clothes become so white and so pure  
And as beautiful as the snow  
And so we will enter heaven together.

But from where two heavy double barreled blunderbusses with round black mouths protruded from rocky clefts, a commanding sharp voice demanded silence and cut the singing as if with a knife.

In this solemn interval Peter recognized with emotion the unconcern of nature. Almost translucent delicate white butterflies with red eyes on their wings blew past him, landing on violet-brown, sweet-scented flower heads. Locusts with scarlet underwings buzzed in short flight. A tiny white cloud sailed under the blue sky in the sunlight, a hawk soared in wide circles as if to look over the people who were lying all around. Thin blue smoke rose from a cooking fire, fluttered like a veil in the breeze, and disappeared. A nuthatch danced up and down the trunk of a spruce, played hide-and-seek, knocked invisibly, and then peeked its little head out. And in all this bird chirping, sunshine, mountain grass, flower smoke, under the little clouds and above the murmur of water, death lurked silently and threateningly.

And Julia was always in him. Longingly he had looked at the small window of the blacksmith's house. When he had already passed by and looked back once more without hope, her white hand had appeared for a moment, oh, only a short moment, between the curtains and had waved.

More it could not dare. To him it was enough, now he knew that she was thinking of him. What came next was a thing for men. The bullets would probably also fly to where he was lying with the Sankt Mareiners, and if it hit him, one at least would cry for him. Only one? Remorse always twitched in his heart when he remembered and Notburga came to his mind, who was waiting somewhere in a foreign country to meet a hard thing, a hard thing that had happened to her through his fault. He looked involuntarily up into the region of the sky where the Swiss mountains lay. Did the little child, dreaming under her heart, pull at the golden thread that connected her with her father, with a man who might not live in an hour and had done nothing to do the poor creature any good? Was there not a box filled with golden money, in the library of the Zeitlanghof?

Sun runner, beautiful sun runner! Why did they call Julia that?

A fierce excited murmur, running from man to man, made him wide awake.

“Pass the word!” the man next to the sleeping Federspiel turned to him.

“Message is here! The Eisack runs red with blood down the valley. Bad things have come to the French at Sterzing. Sandwirt tells all good Tyrolean’s that a great victory has been won!”

Peter passed on the news. Suppressed whooping and waving of hats, waves from one side of the valley to the other quickly announced inflamed enthusiasm.

“Are you a gentleman?” asked an old peasant. “You look very handsome.”

“I’m from Vienna!” returned Peter.

“That’s a good boy. Can you hit anything? A good rifle alone won’t do. How far do you think it is to that same white stone over there?”

Peter measured the distance with his eyes. “I estimate three hundred paces,” he replied.

“You’ve got it figured!” grinned the old man. “Straight out three hundred.”

In that moment a whistling sound rose thin and clear into the air. The lookouts saw the head of the enemy force.

Peter glanced at the rocky ridge. There behind the scout stood the piper and whistled. A shiver passed over Peter like the breath of a glacier. The one who was playing the pipes was the grayish man in the dark red, stained hunting jacket, the peasant with the pitted nose and the parchment lips. The



eyes lay deep in the yellow skull, the stockings flopped around scrawny legs, and the boney fingers went over the yellow wood of the cross pipe.... The death of the Zeitlanghof. Again he saw him. Did others see him too? Funny and bright, bouncing like a dance song, a well-known folk tune came flying, so peaceful and cheerful, that one's heart rose in the flesh. It might have been a lonely shepherd who enjoyed the sounds of the flute that was singing:

Thoughts are free,  
Who can guess them?  
They pass by  
Like the shadows of the night.  
No man can know them,  
No hunter can shoot them  
With powder and lead,  
Thoughts are free!

A dainty ornate trill rolled behind, like a birdsong so sweet.

## SECTION SEVENTEEN

The enemy was there.

A thousand heads rose cautiously to hack and destroy, glowing, dark eyes, sharp, light blue, tired, almost extinguished ones all turned towards the road. The lads, keeping look out behind the chapel, ran off in long bursts.

A Bavarian dragoon on a piebald horse dashed behind them. His broad saber flashed like a blue flame, went out, flashed again. Stunned the rider stopped on the now completely empty road, his heavy horse neighed, turned around, trotted slowly back. White foam flakes blew from the polished bit. The rider plodded along at a jerky trot. A hundred rifle barrels followed him in playful aim.

“Don’t shoot, man! Wait for God’s sake! Until they’re inside the hole!”

Whispers ran through the ranks.

“It would have knocked him off his horse!” said Kinigadner next to Peter, setting down the weighty rifle.

Federspiel had awakened, looked after the rider with flickering eyes.

“Was that a Frenchman?”

“A Bavarian...,” Peter reassured him, his own heart pounding in his throat.

“So again German brothers ahead and the French behind!” sighed the hunter.... “So that’s how it must be.... I can’t help it.”

A roar, clang, blare, unearthly loud in the narrow rocky valley called trumpets, blew a march. Drums swirled. Behind the French march, Germans trotted, enraptured by the martial sound, The militia rejoiced in the brave manner. It sounded for them, too.

The horses of the white dragoons danced and moved in time, their beautiful heads full of courage and fire. The brass trumpets, the braids and buttons, the saddles and bits threw golden sparks. Infinite, unending they came down the street, blue, white, red, dark, silver and gold, flashing copper.

“The ones with the red plumes on the helmets, the blue and black, they are French...” said Kinigadner. He had often traveled with Teimer, even in

the south. It was only a small detachment of French engineer corps soldiers from the Deroy Division attached to the 10th Bavarian Line Infantry Regiment Junker and the Dragoon squadron was attached. Fresh and confident, curious about quarters and wenchies, they marched in the white dust. Colonel Burscheid swayed proudly in his saddle, next to him rode Lieutenant Colonel Vasserot with a yellow-bellied face. A deserter from Battalion Günter knew them, called their names.

“Don’t shoot! Not yet...”

Part of the troops had already crossed the bridge. The wood roared and rumbled. Tui-i-i-tui-i! Far over there, there were two crashes. One of the dragoons, who had ridden ahead over the bridge, tore his caterpillar helmet off his head with a mad movement, swayed as if drunk, and then shot headlong out of the saddle. Comrades grabbed the reins of the snorting riderless nag, and rode back.

The dead man in his white jacket lay in the middle of the dusty wooden planks, his open staring eyes fixed on the vault of the sky under which the swallows were flitting. Red as blood shone the bib, the arms were spread wide. The march faltered, one called, shouted, cursed, looked frightened to where two small gray clouds were rising.

But now the little clouds rose everywhere. A rattling without rules began. One tall Bavarian rolled over like a hare, another collapsed to his knees. Now several fell... One bent down, saw the blood running...

The trumpets sounded. Stop! Halt! Burscheid stopped, Vasserot grasped with white glove the twitching hindquarters of the black horse, withdrew his hand red.

“He-Ha-Ha-Ho!” torn syllables of command cries sounded. Officers roared, leaping out of formation, hewing with flat blade. Thundering and snarling, the echo threw back the crack of gunfire. Gray balls of smoke stood on the slopes, more and more. Here and there, one jumped up from cover, set a bullet on the fresh charge with arms raised.

Brazen ringing, distant howling and roaring mingled with the noise. It was the bells, ringing storm, enemy distress, calling to the last who were still on the way, urging them to hurry...

“It’s on us, Highlanders! It’s on us!”

Suddenly all eyes found a target. A man, a Tyrolean, had crawled forward to the bridge, a bundle of flaming pine shavings in his hand. A small fire flared up. But the old bridge wood was rotten and damp....

Soldiers ran up, threw themselves on the foolhardy man, he screamed, shamed, kicked his feet. Feeding ropes choked him, coiled around his limbs like thin gray snakes. They dragged him with them, in the middle of the column, cut at him, and kicked him in the back of the knees...

And now the Bavarians swarmed out, advancing in wide ranks, bayonet right, up the slope with beating drums. Here and there one of them slipped down the steep slope again, grabbed bush, tree and grass with his hands, gave it up, collapsed and remained lying red-faced. A young lieutenant, red and blue, stood in the middle of the bridge, waving derisively at the peasant gunners.

A Frenchman. Federspiel raised the barrel with flying hands, froze to stone, and stirred the trigger with a bent finger. His shot broke with a bellow.

The Frenchman jumped vertically into the air, fell onto the low railing, rolled over. He swirled darkly in the rippling water, disappeared, came up once more with floating hair and shoulder fringe, then submerged. The river swallowed him, rolled him on over gravel and sand.

“Oh you Saggra tail!” Kinigadner shouted to Peter. “He got him clean!”

Over there, however, where no one from the militia on this side dared to shoot, the Bavarians advanced, however many of them ended up as dead blue spots that speckled the mountain. In closed ranks they fought their way up. One saw many peasants jumping up, covering themselves behind trees, and firing. Rose red beams flashed on the dark background. Many a one had to turn the empty firearm over, break it open, and shove a bullet down the barrel, until a bayonet impaled him to the ground, however much he writhed.

Pale with fright, with cramped hands, the people of St. Mary watched, unable to help. Chirping bullets now came toward them as well. The earth dusted up.

But then it broke from above, the bushes, whistling, whooping, and snapping. Reinforcements from the hamlets and villages. The banging tripled over there. The Bavarians pushed together, made another mighty push....

All at once the peasants diverged, swung right and left. The blue soldiers cried out and pushed up the hill with power.

Then all hell broke loose in front of them. Jets of fire side by side and on top of each other, twentyfold, rapidly following dull bangs.... A wide

strip, a terrible alley was ripped through the foot soldiers, white-haired legs whirled, horrible screams shrilled, roared...

“The Death Organ plays for them..., that organ sure does good!” they cheered over there, throwing their wide hats delightedly into the air. A hundred times the peasants’ guns were banging.

Flight and horror! The soldiers raced down the slope they had so laboriously climbed, tumbling over tree roots and stones, entangled in the twisted limbs of the dead. Many were left with shattered legs, pelvic shots, and abdominal wounds. Angular butts smashed on their skulls so that they broke like glass.

The main force under Burscheid came back to the old spot in the twilight, sitting in the peasant trap. They could go no further. Fists shook against the murderous, unassailable slopes.

A yellow blaze rose, reddening the darkening sky, a shower of sparks rose. Plaintive shouts came from above.

“Prutz is burning! Murder burners! They have set Prutz on fire!”

It gradually grew dark. The rattling and whistling of bullets died away. A single bell still swung, echoing with a whimper.

The wounded... They could be heard now.

“Water! Water! For the blood of Jesus! Mother!”

Peter had fired only one shot. He had clearly seen how the one at which he was aiming had fallen on the snout, how the heavy gun wheel crushed the twitching body. He still held the empty rifle in his hand.

Above, someone scolded the blacksmith.

“What are you standing there for, with your double barrel, ha?”

The grumbling rough voice of Fentor sounded; leave me alone you living piece of garbage! Are you the commander?”

“What did you call me? Do you want to feel my sticking knife?”

“Now it will be right. Now our own people are getting on top of each other in the darkness!” shouted Voglsanger and hurriedly climbed up. Then it became quiet upstairs.

What was the matter with Kinigadner? He sat there so strangely, holding his hand pressed to his chest. You could see it by the light of the lantern dimmed on three sides, which old Josele held in an uncertain hand.

“Jesus, all that blood!” one cried out.

Kinigadner looked slowly around the circle.

“The Father...”

And as if by magic, the red-bearded Capuchin was suddenly there, pulling out a buxus cross from his frock and held it in front of the dying man's face.

"Pray, Kinigadner, before your soul goes out at the bullet hole!" he said.

"Is it - is it really true about the heavenly kingdom?" the dying man gasped, and his breath whistled out of his punctured chest.

"If only it's true, Father..."

"Do you doubt? Do not go to him, the evil enemy. Honestly and righteously you have earned it, the reward of heaven. The gates of heaven of pearls and precious stones will open before you, and the Lord Jesus Himself will lead you in to the many good Tyrolean's who are already waiting for their countrymen. Do not be afraid, you poor man, you faithful one! Pray with me, won't you? Our Father..."

"Father..." sighed the peasant.

A smile crossed his worn face. His head fell to one side.

"Now he's on his way to paradise," the Capuchin said. "As a devout Catholic Christian, he has gone to be with the Lord. For God, emperor and fatherland. Remove the hats, people..."

Humming, they said the Lord's Prayer. And then Voglsanger came with a bulbous wooden barrel. "Drink it, men!" he said softly.

"Brandy with smoking tobacco is in it, it makes a wild rage. And tomorrow in the morning, it needs a rage, so that the heart does not weaken, when we put them down all together!"

But they did not need the poisonous drink. Something happened that made the peasants furious.

From below came a horrible, wailing scream. A person wailed hoarsely, begged, screamed, cried..., screamed again in eerie, long-drawn-out sounds, like a dog howling.

"Don't burn... are you Christian people... Don't burn... Jesus!"

"They torture him whom they have caught on the bridge... It's a servant of Pfunds, Simon Falschlunger... Holy God!" it sounded around Peter.

He covered his ears so as not to hear the horrible screaming of the poor man, whose eyes they were burning out with red-hot ramrods and whose skin they were flaying from his hands with knives. He screamed for a long time.

The peasants sat silently.

“Tomorrow the Inn must be so red that you can still see it in Sprugg,” said one between clenched teeth.

“Tomorrow is payback.”

Starry clear was the night sky over the mountains, over the valley. Below, white with dust and hungry, many times wounded, huddled the weary soldiers, cursing half aloud at the stupidity of the commander who led them into the mouse trap. The many fires on the mountains around told them how they stood. They pulled the horsehide shoes off their feet, cooled the sore skin in the road dust, aired the stiff collars, and untied the chafing horsehair bandages from their necks. There was hardly a place to be found for taking a dump. Loaves of bread passed from hand to hand, there was nothing else. Impatiently they looked for daylight. With all their might they would force their way in the early morning light.

Peter, too, was waiting for the day. Perhaps it was the last morning his eyes saw coming up. A song came to his mind that he had often sung, raving and drinking, a Würzburg student song:

“When the chills of death surround me,  
When the night of decay shows itself to me,  
Then my friend’s arm shall embrace me in  
comfort,  
Then, brothers, dying will be easy for me,  
Brothers, then my breaking gaze blesses  
Still our covenant’s sublime happiness!”

Was he destined to die here? Gradually, the great fatigue won. He slept until he rose up in wild haste, awakened by the beginning noise of battle. The first faint rose glow of the day lay on the peaks. The white over tails of the soldiers shone out. Shots rang out from everywhere. Everyone was awake and ready for battle. Federspiel crouched next to him, teeth chattering, freezing and coughing. Toward Landeck, the din of battle swelled, and from the peasants’ speeches Peter learned that in the gray dawn, Burscheid had tried to leave with the main force in the gray dawn, but had run into the entrenchments built during the night. Again he stood helplessly on the narrow road with guns, carts, horsemen, and columns of foot soldiers, unable to move the jammed masses.

Wait, the peasants were again told. Take your time and, in the meantime, don't shoot too much. The order came from the alpine dairyman, who sat somewhere on the heights and overlooked everything. They should only bump their heads in front and come back so that the work could be completed.

"How are you, Herr Federspiel?" asked Peter, half glancing at Kinigadner, who was quietly and contentedly, bedded a little apart.

"Not as well as that one!" said the hunter, smiling. "But what is not, may yet become. When the South Tyrolean's are through, you will probably get an answer from Giovanelli about the flowers!" he continued.

Then it occurred to Peter that he had completely forgotten to show Federspiel the letter from the plant expert. He quickly took out his wallet and searched in it. The letter was not there, probably lying in the Zeitlanghof under the large rock crystal on the desk. But while searching, something else came into his hands, the note that he had found at the window the first night and which he had then put into this leather bag.

"I have already received the letter and if we should return safely, I will show you Giovanelli's answer. But there is something else, something I found outside my window the first morning. Strange that I never spoke of it to you!"

He handed the note to Federspiel. The latter listened for a moment in the direction of the crackling, and then looked at the piece of paper, read it, and read it again.

"A warning," he then said. "A warning from the fire spirits. It's too bad I didn't hear about it until today."

"You can understand it?" asked Peter in wonder.

"It's Roma," Federspiel nodded. "And its old Roma, as it is perhaps still spoken in some places in the Engadin and was probably once spoken here as well. I understand this dialect a little."

"So you can tell what it means?"

"Now I see the light," exclaimed Federspiel, tapping the leaf with the back of his hand. "And it fits in well with the avalanche of rocks from the Schellbock that would soon have taken me with it. They're more honest than I thought, the fire spirits, and sent you a warning on the very first day."

"So tell me at last what it means!" urged Peter excitedly.

"It means, 'He who walks forbidden paths loses his life,' no more, no less. And you've been carrying that for months now..."



Violent banging rose all around. The road below was suddenly filled with soldiers flooding back, horsemen who could barely restrain their half-crazed horses, carriages, and guns. Into this shouting, pushing, mutually harassing throng the enraged peasants shot mercilessly...

A high-pitched shriek, which drowned out the whipping of the shots, as cutting as if it did not come from human mouths at all, flew from the heights.

“In the name of the Holy Trinity - desist!”

Hatchets flashed among the Sankt Mareiners, muffled purrs of taut, abruptly cut ropes sped back. With a terrible rumbling, splintering, dust clouds, logs, earth masses, and angular blocks, stone debris tumbled down the slope, hit the ground, rose up and smashed with terrible violence into the middle of the people, crushing everything to a bloody pulp. A single, thousand-voiced scream rose, brown clouds covered everything.

The downfall! The whistling of bullets increased a hundredfold, the double barreled blunderbusses roared, the Organ of the Dead thunderously chased its heavy projectiles across the valley. All twenty barrels of the murderous organ slithered, plowing alleys into the desperately flailing foot soldiers, and wounded horses flailed and let out screams that were more gruesome than the human wail.

In the seething eddies of the Inn it swam blue, white, spinning drowning, raised rowing arms, air-snapping heads. Bullets quickly ducked under the loamy water. Reddish gut loops were wrapped around a shattered tree trunk, a horse leg with a white fetlock twitched from a pile of stone debris. Screaming, a soldier tore at two human feet moving feebly under a large boulder, blood trickled over wailing and cursing mouths, hands pressed on crushed eyeballs. The desperate, defenseless climbed up the slope, running back and forth, standing stupidly around. They were looking at each other up to their knees in the rushing water. Bullets drove through their bodies, shattered their bones, and threw them down. Peter saw how Federspiel shot, loaded and fired again, without stopping. He, too, was gripped by fever. Without aiming, he pulled the trigger several times, right into the midst of the heaps of half insane soldiers who were pushing and shoving each other. None of the French could be seen anymore.

In the midst of the roar of the street of death, a Bavarian dragoon officer sat calmly and bravely on his brown horse and talked to the people.

One could see that he succeeded in gathering a few determined people around him, forcing them into line. His good horse was standing on three legs; the fetlock of the lifted right forefoot was covered with blood.

“Shoot!” said a hollow voice beside Peter, who had just loaded.

He flinched, the rifle at the ready. Against his will, his finger bent, touched the trigger. The bullet flew out of the barrel.

The officer fell with his face on the horse’s neck, tried to get up. His hand reached into the air. Slowly he slid out of the seat, fell to the ground.

Frozen, Peter looked down. The man struggled to get up once more, propped himself up with his hand, looked around him. But then he collapsed and laid quite still, his still defiant chin strapped by the helmet’s storm strap.

Adversarial laughter grumbled behind the gunner. In furious horror, Peter looked behind him. But no one stood behind him.

“It’s hard...” Federspiel gritted out, nodding at Peter. His eyes were filled with tears.

“I will never like it!” he cried all at once, flinging the rifle to the ground. Then he put his face in both hands and cried.

“Germans...” Peter heard him say.

“They’ll give themselves up! They’ve got their part,” shouted then from all sides.

“Grab them, men! Down, all of you!”

And raging masses rolled downward. A wild noise raced. They swept Peter along.

He found himself among those crowding around the horse, yanking Vasserot from the saddle.

“Where is the commander? I want the commander...” the lieutenant colonel cried, pale-faced, gasping under the shame of the moment.

Laughter, spitting, roaring, fists reared up.

“We have no commander. Surrender, Fool!”

There was no more resistance. Guns clanged on the earth, the straps of the sidearms flew from the shoulders, and the timid coverings tumbled with the guns over the embankment, The shallow bank water splashed up. Peasants jerked their horses up, one remained lying with broken legs. A boy held a rider’s pistol to his ear and pulled the trigger. Smoke enveloped the animal’s sinking head. The dead were dragged by their legs and arms into

the ditch, shouted that Major Büllingen's battalion had fled. They had to go after him. It was Senn who shouted thus.

"Let the country magistrate bawl!" said one. "Now we're going home. If they want to try it again, we'll all be there!"

Many hundreds of prisoners loitered, looking dull and timid.

But great as the rage had been, they did them no harm. The joy of victory awakened the old good-naturedness. Well, it was over. And the Bavarians there, they could no longer do anything to anyone. "Do you want something to eat? Are you thirsty?"

They laughed broadly; glad of the good turn, one of them quickly said that it was the French who had maltreated Pfund's servant to death. They, the Bavarians, had not joined in.

"That's your luck!" shouted Voglsanger. "Otherwise we would have done the same to you!"

In sudden fear, Peter approached one of the soldiers.

"Did a lieutenant Bartenstein come along?"

The Bavarian, a sergeant, shook his head.

"In the 10th Regiment, no officer's name is Bartenstein."

Peter breathed a sigh of relief.

"Been here, too?" Zangerl said to him at that moment. "That's good of you."

"I wouldn't want a second time..." Peter shuddered.

He had stepped on the hand of a dead man.

The head gunner smiled sadly.

"You're quite right, it's shuddering. The street is slippery with human blood. My God! Why must the powerful always go out to conquer countries that have done them no harm, as they are called? When will the world be so wide that each people may say: I want to belong there and there - and no one invades it with army power because of that?"

"Zangerl! Where to with the prisoners? Senn is looking for you," someone shouted, and the chief rifleman hurriedly followed the voice.

Peter hung the rifle over his armpit and slowly climbed up the mountain in a water runoff. At the top he found Federspiel. He pointed sideways.

There sat Anderl Kinigadner by the corpse of his father and prayed, while the thick tears rolled down his cheeks.

“We must leave him there in the meantime,” said the hunter. “He doesn’t hear what is said to him, poor lad.... If you would like to help me a little, Herr Storck, I’ll see if I can crawl all the way to Sankt Marein.”

There were even more dead people there than Kinigadner, and there were enough crying women, A clenched fist stood out of freshly thrown up earth.

“Manly folk!” said Federspiel. “How defiantly they still rise in death. They’re Germans, too. And they can’t be forced. That is my consolation. They always rise again, again and again - even from the graves.”

It was hard for the hunter. His foot hurt and was threatening to twist. It was fortunate that Voglsanger came the same way.

“They’re never coming,” said the peasant, making a throwing gesture with his hand toward the lower land.... “They don’t...”

Federspiel contorted his face. “God grant you’re right, Voglsanger,” he said. “But...”

“Have you not seen Christian Lergetpohrer anywhere?” interrupted Peter quickly, fearing that Federspiel might upset the other one with his gloomy prophecies.

“He wasn’t with the Sankt Mareiners.”

Voglsanger shook his head.

“He’s never going with us!” he said. “Christian’s all wrong on the inside, as he’s in one piece on the outside. The Capuchin priest was already with him but Christain won’t let anyone in. It is also of no use, as the spiritual master says, that he wants to banish the spirit...”

“What are you talking about?” The hunter stopped, leaning on his sticks.

“Everyone knows,” replied Voglsanger gravely, “that Christian has a little ghost with him at all hours, a dead boy who has him completely in his power...”

“How can you believe that?” Federspiel got excited. “There are no ghosts. He is sick in the mind, nothing more!”

The peasant stopped and looked at him under dark bushy brows.

“Ei, how clever! Did you learn that in your studies, that there are no ghosts? And where, if you’ll pardon me, does the immortal soul go when the body has died and gone west?”

“To God...” Peter answered.

“Would be right. But what if God doesn’t like the soul? Did you hear the song the boys from Finstermünz sang yesterday, the one about the soul that stands before the door of heaven? Kranewitter Sepp, of whom it is said for certain that he pushed his own brother over the red wall because of a chamois they were fighting over. That Sepp, who is also lying down there with a hole above his right ear... Do you believe, lord, that the same one goes in and out of the heavenly door like that? I mean, if someone was like Sepp, then it’s time to go back down, go through the whole thing again and be good, so good, until the soul becomes like a white dove. And it will be the same with the drummer boy: It still can’t enter God’s kingdom, and the one who shot him to death hears it weeping and wailing for its life, in which it should have expiated and not come to an end according to the will of God!”

“So I hope to have another foot when I come back, and another bellows in my chest...” said Federspiel grimly. He sat down on the grassy bank where the lizards were rustling.

“Nonsense!”

“It’s awkward, but I’ll bring it up,” said Voglsanger apprehensively. “As I sit here, I have seen a damned soul in the valley below come out of a nun, and it wasn’t long ago.”

Peter remembered the possessed woman. The ghastly image was still before his eyes, as she writhed and twisted under the incantations of the Father.

“It was the soul of a man who did much evil a hundred and a hundred years ago, and once, since the sister had sinful desires, found shelter in her. And I was there on Sunday during Lent, when the soul spoke out of her again in a deep voice and said that at twelve o’clock at noon it would leave. The priest implored it again to indicate in which form. So it said, in the form of three small balls it would leave the mouth of the sister. And at twelve o’clock, screaming and howling, three little balls of saliva, quite round and whitish, came out of her mouth, they were caught on a cloth and immediately burned. And from that hour on she was at peace and is completely healthy today. And if Christian had called the priest I think he could have been helped.”

“Oh you brainless ass - I would soon have said,” laughed the hunter. “And what was his name, then, the spirit of spit?”

“Such a thing is not to be mocked,” the peasant defended himself.

“So I would rather go on in a thousand pains than listen to such gossip,” Federspiel fretted, and stood up with a groan.

“How one can be so stupid...”

“There are many who are called stupid, and the same see more in the darkness than the very clever in the sunshine,” said Voglsanger. “And you and the gentleman will see what the end will be for Christian if the Father is not allowed. The boy will drag him along. That’s what I say.”

Silent and disgruntled, they walked on. When the last, steep part of the path came, they had to support Federspiel on both sides. The sweat ran down his face from agony and exertion.

The village was empty. A few skinny chickens were looking for food, abandoned cows bellowed miserably, on the meadows stood tall grass, untouched by any scythe.

Voglsanger and Peter took the laboriously limping man to his hut. Something darted in through the door, stopped sheepishly.

“You devil witch, you brood of druids!” Voglsanger cried out, making a cross in front of Sylvana, who looked at him, smiling shyly and uncertainly.

“Shall I burn your skin with holy water, you nightmare?”

Hastily he put his fingers into the little clay holy well trough on the post and pulled them out again dry.

“Nothing in it...”

“Leave the little sprite, Voglsanger,” laughed the hunter. “It’s good of you to come and help me, little frog. Go, fetch some water for my gunpowder-blackened hands and bring me some wood, you little charcoal girl!”

Voglsanger tugged Peter by the sleeve, and they went out.

“Now I know that the hunter is in league with the devil,” he said outside. “The witch is at home with him!”

## SECTION EIGHTEEN

In the poorly tidied room of the Zeitlanghof, where on a carelessly laid table stood the black pan with the fan. Heavy and sad thoughts were lurking in the young man's mind. He almost felt sorry that he had sent the talkative and curious old woman down to stay alone. Now the lingering images of the gruesome battle assailed him with all their force. He could hardly bear the memory of the officer on horseback, reliving over and over again the poor man's fall from grace, torn from his horse by his bullet. He thought of the cries for help, of the pleading pleas for pardon that the enemy soldiers had emitted, in the same language that was spoken here in the country. Little pity had become them, by the hundreds they had been shot, slain, crushed, drowned. The cries of those martyred in the dark night, their whimpering and pleading, resounded in his ears, and between them sang the song of free thoughts. Small perceptions gliding past alongside the horror came again: A butterfly that sat on the blood splatters in the grass and lowered its proboscis into the red drops, a boy who kicked a dead Bavarian in the body with his foot and was about to burst out laughing when a sickening sound was heard. My God, what had the captain done, what had the gunner done, what had the poor devils into whose tangled bodies he had fired the rifle done? He forced himself to think of the terrible reports from Schwaz. Perhaps, in such a way, one could feel like an instrument of the punishing God...

How his life had changed in a few months! Where had his light sense, his joy of existence gone? Wasn't his hair already turning gray in the bloom of his youthful years? A nonsensical, hopeless love had taken possession of his heart; a wild whirlpool of ghostly events had seized him.

He had murdered, and now understood Christian Lergetpohrer, comprehended the events in his poor soul; the plight of the good-natured man was clear to him. He had to defend himself with all his strength against the faces of the dead, who fell by his hand, because one ordered it. To the one who was out there on the wall of the gray gloomy house, the piper who played a tune, to which everyone had to step. Everyone. There was no one who didn't have to learn to do the dance....

When he woke up from his cloudy senses, it gradually began to darken. At this hour, he had often played with Spirit. He, too, had passed away, yes, even the dog he had saved from the butcher's knife of the charcoal burner Fentor. He still thought he could feel the caressing cold snout on his hand. Alas, nobody cared about him...

The floor cracked. He almost cried out loud with bliss. It was a miracle! Julia stood in front of him, and his soul flared up in red blaze.

"I'm so glad," she said softly, putting her slender hand on his shoulder. "You have come back!"

He wanted to jump up, but the girl's hand gently pushed him back into the chair.

"I want you to stay seated," she smiled, taking a seat on a carved chest some distance away. "I have come up here and no one has seen. That's good. And you're back!"

She raised her arms for a moment, as if to hold them out to him. But then her beautiful brows drew together and earnestly she looked him in the face.

"Why are you so sad?" she asked.

"Oh yes, I am sad, Julia!" he said, lowering his head. "I have witnessed terrible things, killed someone.... Shot a young officer, too, Julia!"

"Did it have to be?" she asked softly.

"No!" Muffled sounded back.

"My question was idle!" She swayed her head slowly back and forth. "Everything that happens must happen, after all. It will pass, Herr Storck, you will forget!"

He rose, reaching for the lamp.

"Oh don't!" she begged, "it's so nice to be in this half-light. And I am so glad you have come back."

He took a step toward her, his heart beginning to beat faster.

"Are you playing with me, Julia?" he cried. "Didn't you know how hard it was for me to wait, how I longed for you? And yet you let me pine away...!"

"Well, here I am!" she replied gently. "Have come to you as I promised..."

"Julia!" he cried, overcome with hot emotion. "Be kind in this hour. Solve the riddles that surround you, that torment and worry me. Who are you? What are you looking for, in the midst of this terrible time of revolt,



here in this corner of the world? Don't you understand how everything that surrounds you must affect me? How am I to understand that you, the pure one, with the misguided charcoal-burner people, that you, the pure one, are best friends with a forest animal, like Sylvana? That you are friends with the half-wild blacksmith, with the strange pitch-collector? And the flowers? Where did you get the flowers you lost on the way?"

She stood up, her face glowing white.

"You promised me..."

"I cannot keep that promise," he continued passionately. "Do you understand: my old uncle has disappeared in an inexplicable manner, and you relate his disappearance to those supposed mountain spirits called fire spirits? And more and more it becomes clear to me that you, Julia, know more about these spirits and their strange goings-on than other people in Sankt Marein."

"They may be mysteries!" she said after a while. "But by all that is sacred to me, I swear to you that they are things which you can be indifferent to. Believe me, after all, Herr Storck. And your uncle..." She faltered.

"My uncle...?"

He grasped her trembling hand. "Speak now, Julia, now at this moment that may never return."

"I can't, I can't!" she said, her hand trembling in his. "I must not speak. But leave the fire spirits alone, for my sake, let them go about their harmless business, for none of them have harmed your uncle."

"Now I know that you are one of those who are hostile to me," he said sadly, "The very first day a threat was made to me.

"It was a warning..."

"So tell me who sent it?" he pressed her.

"One who knew you would walk forbidden paths, like that hunter..."

"Whom they almost murdered," he interposed bitterly.

"It was his fault."

Her voice sounded very low.

"Why doesn't he leave people alone who do no evil? Why does he want to know things that mean nothing to him? Why does he care?"

"I want to know these things too, Julia."

"No, no... don't do it! I beg of you." Her eyes were full of tears.

Gently he stroked her hair.

“Why do you care so much for me, Julia?”

There came a sobbing sound from her mouth; in a sudden movement she put her hand delicately around his face, and her lips touched his mouth very softly and sweetly.

*“Eau ti tegn char; eau sunt tien!”* she whispered, scarcely audible.

But just as quickly she drew back, reaching out defensively against him:

“I must away! I must away quickly!” she stammered, “I’ll see you again.”

He held her tightly.

“Not till I know what you said in a foreign tongue.... for the second time, Julia!”

“It’s nothing, nothing!” she cried, turning her face away. - “Let me go away!”

She extricated herself from his arms, ran to the door. Like a shadow, silently, she was gone.

In spite of the disappointment, a delightful feeling of happiness remained. She loved him! There was no longer any doubt. She loved him and had feared for him.

And in spite of the black wings of the gloomy mystery that lay over her and her life, the certainty filled him with unspeakable bliss.

“Sweet Julia!” he thought. “Fairest, dearest... I will not rest till I know what fills your little heart with fear and neither forest devil nor fire bane shall hinder me!”

Was it not as if the touch of the flowery cool hand had taken the blood-guilt from him? The fear was gone from him, the eerie images faded. How far away it was all at once, how distant, as if the battle had taken place years ago, as an event he was able to think of without any particular emotion.

It was impossible for him to stay in the room. As he left the house, a long golden shooting star shot across the black sky. People said that a wish, thought at that moment, must come true.

“So she must become mine...” it exulted within him. Oh, he was young again, his years still danced on light soles, and the heaviness that since yesterday had been suffocatingly laid on him fell away.

In front of the Rose Inn stood a group of peasants, who would probably have preferred to celebrate the victory, by the sobbing barmaid and the

niece of Christian, who was also in tears.

“So we go to Patscheider. He’ll pour us a gentian tea,” said Hornauss, spitting on the ground. “It’s all over with the innkeeper of the Rose.”

“What’s wrong with him?” asked Peter, approaching the girls.

They pointed down the hall, unable to speak. The men shrugged and slowly went their way.

“What are you going to do?” one of them muttered.

“The Father may not come anymore either...”

Peter stepped quickly into the gloomy corridor and put his hand on the handle of the drinking room. But the door was locked and did not give way. A high falsetto voice came out, laughed, spoke and sang. Did the innkeeper have a woman with him? Peter put his ear to the wood. There was nothing to understand. He heard only a wailing lament.

Determined, Peter knocked, called the innkeeper by name, and spoke of important news he was carrying. But inside, a strange chattering began again and no answer came.

Then he braced his shoulder against the door, gave two or three strong blows against the old wood, until the latch bolt broke out of the rotten doorframe and Peter himself nearly crashed to the floor as the door flew open. It was not a special sight that presented itself to him, and yet cold horror crept down his spine.

Christian Lergetpohrer, the Rose innkeeper, was sitting at the table in his shirt and pants in front of a burned tallow candle. His face showed a peculiarly childlike cheerfulness, the big blue eyes looked empty and without consciousness. With his hands he fingered the air and spoke incessantly, loudly sometimes, then almost inaudibly, in a thin, whiny boy’s voice, which then broke again in yowling.

“Christian, what on earth are you doing?” cried Peter at him. “Don’t you know me?”

Behind him the two maids crowded.

But the innkeeper didn’t seem to see him at all, chattering and complaining on. Gradually they understood one by one.

“... Do you mean that I don’t bring my elbows together on my back, Lenz? Would they have taken me as a drummer otherwise, you stupid guy? And the vertebrae at the guard parade, I’m always even finer, like Emil, the Saxon Filou, my dear. Only I can’t find one shoe anymore.

It was too big for me anyway and flew away just as the Tyrolean shot me. He shot me in the head, Oh yes. Must just go around at night without the shoe. You can only hear a foot tapping - tapping - tapping - tapping, when it's quiet. The sergeant has stolen the cremation money, buys his fat old lady a red petticoat skirt with it, ten pounds of lard and a new hood. I never eat at her place; it only costs two kreuzers a day. You know, Lenz, you'll probably know how she does it:

‘Come, sit down here with me, you little drummer, do me a bit of good, mine’s all too old already! You know her, the fat girl. She’s out for the boys. Let’s sing one together, dear comrade, and you do the second part, right? Merry well:’

“I am a poor drummer boy,  
They lead me out of the arches,  
Yes, out of the arches.  
If I had remained a drummer,  
I wouldn’t have to lie imprisoned,  
I wouldn’t be trapped.”

“And now the second verse!”

Peter could stand it no longer. He walked with wobbling knees towards Christian, grabbed him by the arm and shook him firmly:

“Christian! Dear Christian! Wake up already!”

But the innkeeper only smiled, foolishly stroked the hand that had grasped his arm, and said, “It is not yet reveille, you rude corporal, and I am allowed to still sleep a quarter of an hour. And just now I am still singing:”

Oh gallows, you high house,  
How terrible you look,  
Yes, you look!”

A wild sobbing interrupted the singing. The strong man threw both arms on the table, put his head there and cried heartbreakingly. No calling, no laying on of hands would help.

Shaken, Peter turned to the horrified girls.

“A doctor must be called!” he said, and at the same time he knew that no doctor could help the unfortunate.

“He won’t let anyone else in,” whispered the cousin. “He has the loaded rifle with him on the bench, old Frau Patchscheider was already here, she can discuss the addiction, and the Father was here. But everyone runs away when the host turns his eyes up and reaches for the rifle.”

“So one must stay up and take care that he does not hurt himself!” said Peter.

The two cried out and crossed themselves.

“You stay here, Moidl!”

“Me? So that the spirit can possess me?!”

Peter heard them arguing as they walked. They were afraid, not wanting to stay in the house overnight. Tired to death, he fell into his bed. The next day he went early in the morning to Federspiel. The hunter was up and limping around the room, pale and sullen. A kettle hung on the stove over a smoldering fire, in which soup was bubbling.

“Where is Sylvana?” asked Peter, looking around the room. “It looks clean and homely in your place today!”

“She cleaned house for awhile and then we slept together. She must have stepped over me in the morning; I didn’t hear her get up. But the soup is there. I can’t believe she’s gone again! All night she lay with me, like a purring cat so warm and cuddly.”

Peter sat down on a wobbly chair and watched Federspiel pour the milk soup into a bowl. The hunter took two wooden spoons from the drawer and made an inviting gesture with his hand.

“I’ve already had breakfast, thank you!” Peter declined, and then abruptly continued, “It’s a foreign phrase and I’d like to have it in German:

*“Eau ti tegn char, eau sunt tien!”*

“What might that mean?”

The other looked at him out of one half-closed eye.

“It’s a lovelier phrase than the one on the piece of paper you found outside the window. Well, to him to whom a rose mouth thus speaks, ‘I love thee, I am thine!’”

Peter felt himself blushing.

“It has not been said to me...”

The little room with the antlers, the poor utensils, and the bare ceiling widened into Golden-rosy distances, silver bells rang....

But the mocking voice of the hunter broke the spell:

“Nevertheless, I am glad from the heart that you have met the amorous spell.”

Two bright blue, clever eyes saw Peter’s renewed blush.

“With Lergetpohrer it takes on a bad face,” Peter said hastily, and told what he was experiencing in the evening with the Rose Innkeeper.

Federspiel slowly finished his soup and then said, “The poor devil has had too soft a disposition all his life. I know how he cried, like a child he cried, yes, because of his old Tyras. The dog was sick, had to suffer a lot of pain, cried all night long; and then we decided that I should shoot him. The dog didn’t feel a thing; I quickly put him out of his misery and buried him in the meadow. My God, how Christian acted then! And now with the little drummer, it’s never going to be good. He’ll never get away.”

“He’s possessed, the people say.”

The hunter struck the tabletop with the flat of his hand so that the bowl clinked.

“We have heard the hay ox, Voglsanger, talking about it. But that you, Herr Storck, repeat it! Sick in the mind he is. Nothing more.”

“It comes down to the same thing, though...” objected Peter. “Whether you call it that or the other...”

“But the way you call it, Herr Storck, is not the way to name a disease among the superstitious people here. With such names one causes mischief. Don’t you know that there have already been several possessed people here? Go to our chapel and look at the large picture there. People like you and me, have the duty to talk people out of such nonsense. Isn’t it already dark enough in the peasants’ heads? If only once I’ve tracked down the fire spirits, I’m hoping for a lot. Because then they will see what the ghostly work is all about. And, Herr Storck,” he added with a sharp look, “don’t get confused, even if it sounds like angelic music. Bacon catches mice, and love catches men!”

“Herr Federspiel!” Peter jumped up. “What do you mean?”

The hunter remained unmoved.

“I don’t like sneaking around the straight word,” he said. “That’s what I’m a German for. Quite simply, I was given the box-brown forest fox into my house and you something finer and more beautiful!”

“This I do not tolerate, my lord!”

Angrily, Peter stretched up.

“The lady of whom you-”

“Done!”

Federspiel put his hand on Storck’s raised arm.

“Shall we play theater here with flourishes and crosses of blades? That you asked me for the meaning of the phrase made everything clear to me. With you it is done daintily and genteelly; for Serafin Federspiel two hard little breasts and soothing limbs are good enough. Just don’t go off, Herr Storck, this is no salon of the genteel, but here it is about life. Unless, of course, you’ve been persuaded to abandon our mutual resolution and leave the fire spirits unscathed. My foot still reminds me of the plans we were to carry out together...”

A quiet disgust reached out to Peter. Could it be possible that Julia...? But he dismissed the thought far away. This noble girl did not lie. He felt too strongly that it was only fear for him that had driven her to him.

Again it was as if Federspiel could see inside him.

“Understand me right.”

His voice sounded softer.

“I don’t want to revile anyone you worship. But I would be sorry, bitterly sorry, if for the sake of two beautiful eyes and a sweet voice you gave up something you owe to the memory of your uncle. For again I tell you: his disappearance is connected with the fire spirits. I can’t prove it, but a feeling that doesn’t lie tells me so. And she has talked you out of it, I can see it in your face, talked you out of it just as my little bed warmer, who couldn’t babble enough, talked me out of it, how I should beware of too many changes in the mountains, of paths where death walks around. There is a thing with both of them; it is the fire spirits that speak from them!”

For a while Peter stood in affected silence.

Then he said, “A right fellow finishes what he sets out to do, or he perishes in the process. Here is my hand! I’ll go along with it when the time comes, and no one shall dissuade me. But no more about the demoiselle.”

“Yes, yes!” smiled the other. “We are full of good intentions, we two. And yet we cannot let go of the one thing that is our wine and perfume in this wasteland. You don’t and I don’t, as much as we know it takes the strength from us. And now I want to taste it and go down with you to Christian!”

Things looked different at the inn than Peter had feared. Christian seemed to have overcome the haunting of the night. Even though he looked

dilapidated and over-nighted, there was nothing out of the ordinary about his speech. He was drinking with a couple of riflemen who were discussing the departure of Marshal Lefebvre. Peter and Federspiel, well respected as Pontlatz's comrades-in-arms of late, had to sit down with them and let them in on the dark-red special notice. Joy shone from the eyes of the valiant men. Now the enemy's greed had certainly come to an end. For Andrä Hofer sat broad and firm in the castle at Innsbruck and ruled skillfully. Of course, the lords in the city let their mouths drop, and the shamed women finally learned to dress demurely, and the overly clever professors had to give way to pious, learned priests. All was well above board. Only in the south the weather boiled up again. French regiments were gathering in Italy.

"But," cried Kloiber, "they'll be grumbling for a while yet about the grind. And if they again have guts, come on! Come on!"

There were also some at the table who showed little desire for boastful speeches and made worried faces. One had already heard the cheers too often, that it was now over and done with, and yet the war fury had risen again. They were tough, the foreign devils of hell, and as many as they were slain, there were always new ones that came again and again.

"How are you, Christian?" Peter asked Lergetpohrer half aloud. The host looked at him uncomprehendingly.

"Going? For me?" he said. "It's always better with me in the daytime."

Abrupt fear flickered in his eyes.

"The wine helps..., there man forgets..."

It gurgled from the glass down his throat.

"Bright lights on Tirol!" cried Aufschnaiter, throwing his hat to the ceiling. "Give me another wine, you darling, you dear!"

The barmaid shrieked under his grip and ran with the empty bottle.

And then they sang the song of free thoughts:

And lock me up  
In dungeons and chains,  
There I am alone,  
No man can save me.  
But my thoughts  
Tear down the barriers  
And walls in two,  
Thoughts are free.



After that, they took off their socks and gunpowder horns, put on their workday clothes and set to work as peasants, true to the barren earth for which so many of them had given their lives.

## SECTION NINETEEN

In the bright morning Peter went into the garden of the Zeitlanghof, which he had not cared for before, looked with remorse at the fruit trees, which were in urgent need of care and grafting, and gathered all his knowledge from this area. Caterpillar nests were hanging in the branches; leaf rollers were doing their harmful work. It was time for him to take better care of the estate than before.

For the time being it was entrusted property, for which perhaps an account had to be given. Also he wanted to visit the pine forest, in which the pitch scraper was allowed to scrape without supervision, in these quiet days. It could also be that the Zeitlanghof could have a mistress. The thought was too beautiful not to bring fearful doubts. Did she really love him? The poison, which had come from Federspiel's words, was lingering, and a dark veil was gradually settling over the oft-spun dreams that had hitherto been so light and golden.

There was a loud rustling on an old apple tree. He went over and saw just two rosy bare legs wriggling and disappearing into the branches. As he stepped closer, he could make out Sylvana hiding from him. He had to laugh out loud and reached for her feet. A bitten green apple flew into his face. Then he grabbed her and pulled the screaming woman down to him, catching her in his arms.

"Got you, you apple thief?" he joked. "Now at least you shall answer me, Forest Cat!" She looked him in the face from below and laughed.

"Where is the beautiful Fräulein that she is not seen?" he asked more seriously. For the windows in the blacksmith's house were closed.

"Where can she be? Driven to Sprugg. Run after her, stop her!" she taunted, trying with all her strength to slip from his grasp.

All at once he let go of her quickly.

"You're scratching!" he cried, rubbing his hand.

"Why are you hurting me with your coarse claws?" she scolded angrily. "And what is your beauty to me?"

"How can you be so wicked, Sylvana!" he cajoled. "Would you like to come up with me?"

She smiled at once and snuggled up to him.

“Gladly,” she said softly, and her eyes sparkled.

“But you have to sneak carefully so that the old lady of the house doesn’t hear you,” he warned. “I don’t want people’s mouths to drop.”

She nodded her understanding and slipped silently behind him.

The library, with all the colorful, strange, and glittering things lying around and hanging on the walls, sent her into a frenzy of delight. Sniffing, she moved her freckled little nose, touching and feeling everything within her reach. He watched her with amusement, as she celebrated every moment with a little cry of joy for shiny crystals or for a colored glass, for a spotted bird’s egg or a bowl of metal, to immediately reach for, only to discover a silver sugar shaker or a silk pillow right after.

“Give me that...!” she cried, yet not knowing herself what to wish for first.

At last he directed her attention to something that sent her into a frenzy of excitement.

It was a small music box with a lift-off lid, revealing the toothed brass cylinder and the bright steel reeds of the movement. When you pushed down the lever, a Mozart minuet sounded fine and glassy, like ghost music. The blue, yellow, and red birds that decorated the gold-ornamented porcelain of the box seemed to chirp.

“Oh! Oh!” she cried, placing the singing gem on the ground and lying down beside it, completely entranced.

When the playing ceased, he showed her how to insert the little key into the body of a blue bird and brought the thing back to life.

Then she jumped up, stripped off her shirt and skirt before he could stop her, and stood before him as naked and pretty as an elf.

“Aren’t I beautiful?” she cried enticingly, looking at him with a tilted head. “Just look at me...”

“I’ve seen you like this before, Sylvana!”

She looked at him with large eyes and put her hand to her small breast.

“That one?” she smiled.

“No... The way you are now. At the spring in the forest above...”

She let out a cry.

“You’re lying...!”

“You and the beautiful Julia and your brother. And you were dancing...”

A cloud passed over her cheeky little face. She picked up the box from the floor, placed it hard on the table so that the musical mechanism sounded. Silently she slipped her shirt on, tied the short skirt around her narrow hips.

“You saw her naked?” she then said tonelessly.

“Yes, her.”

He violently regretted his rashness. But it was too late now.

“And you, too...”

“Then God dies...!” she stammered in horror. “Woe!” She threw herself on the daybed and burst into wild tears.

“Sylvana...!”

Affected, he stroked the sobbing woman.

“What are you talking about? Who has to die?”

“God is dying...!” she cried.

He grabbed his forehead. What came into the child’s mind?

“Sylvana, good witch,” he said, sitting down with her. “Why do you call the Demoiselle the Sun Runner? Tell me, and I’ll give you the music there in return!”

She half straightened up, propped herself on her arm, and looked at him with darkened eyes.

“You have walked in the forbidden ways,” she murmured with a strange gloom. “You have brought death...”

“Speak now, Sylvana. Take what you will. Seek out in this room what your heart desires. But tell me what you know. You once called yourself a raven, and your brother spoke of himself as a hidden one. Also, once upon a time, you had a red flower in your hair, which does not grow anywhere else. You are clever, Sylvana, and can easily explain all this to me, if only you will. And if you’ll only tell me what Miss Julia has to do with you?”

Then she hissed at him like a wild cat, and cried, “Nothing, nothing, nothing will I say. Do you hear? And if you give me everything that is in this beautiful house! You can burn me alive and I will say nothing. Never, never!”

He saw that he would accomplish nothing in this way.

“Well, say nothing to me then, Sylvana,” he relented. “The box with the colorful little birds and the music is still yours!”

A faint glow of pleasure passed over her face.

“And you’ll let me have it...?” she inquired, “won’t you take it away?”

“No, little Sylvana. I’m giving you the tin.”

She ran to the table, pressed the can tenderly to her heart and clasped it with both hands.

“Won’t you let me once...” She uttered an ugly word that she must have heard from some fellow.

“No, Sylvana,” he said, becoming almost sad at the thought of this still childlike yet knowing girl. “I don’t want anything from you.”

She lowered her eyes. “I already know why you don’t want me. You love her.”

“Sylvana...”

“Yes, you love her and she loves you. And that brings death.”

Now he was really frightened.

“I ask nothing of you,” he spoke hastily, “But you have spoken of death for the second time. Sylvana, I must know what this means. And I beg you, dear Sylvana, tell me. You are a little woman, after all, and you must know what it is like to love someone. You also love one more than anyone else. Though I don’t know who it is...”

“It is Serafin,” she said, and her cheeks darkened.

“Now look, if you were told that Serafin Federspiel must die, you would ask why, wouldn’t you?”

“He must die soon, after all,” she whispered softly. “He said it himself. And that’s why I often cry...” Her eyes were full of water, her mouth twisted into a cry.

“Don’t cry, don’t cry,” Peter comforted her. “Serafin can get quite well. No one must deny him life.”

“You are good...” she smiled and stroked his hand. “With the others, it’s nothing. But Serafin, I love him more than anything in the world.”

“Then you can understand me, Sylvana. Who is threatening Julia?” he urged her, dull fear in his heart.

She looked at him, seemed to struggle with herself for a while, and then said hesitantly and quietly, “No one is threatening her... This one thing I will tell you: it is said among those, who are knowledgeable:

‘If the purity of the sun runner is stained, God dies!’...”

Was this a child who so seriously, in such well-placed words, touched upon a secret whose deepest content she was not allowed to reveal? It became a certainty to him, that a part of the people here was sworn to a covenant that demanded the strictest secrecy from the initiates and

relentlessly denied any who made an attempt to solve the riddles of his work. What was hidden under the strange names, the nocturnal fires high in the mountains, the dances in secret places? What was this god who was subject to death?

The girl stood before him; the music-box she held tightly against herself and her eyes clung longingly and anxiously to the door.

“So run,” he laughed affectedly.

Then she took a step toward him, stood on her toes to reach his ear, and whispered, “They all know it, that you are lying in wait for them..., you and Serafin...”

And swift as a fleeing animal she had sprung from the room.

It had been time, for soon after old Hirlanda appeared with the tablecloth to cover the table.

On the evening of that day, heavy with a consuming longing for Julia, Peter suddenly thought again of his uncle’s old book, which had been locked away in the desk like an important legacy, instead of standing among the hundreds of other books, some of which had strange contents.

He pulled out the “treasure box” with the instructions for making gold, healing gout, with the surprises of a coarse and drinking time from the drawer, in which it had slumbered unnoticed for so long, and again struggled to find any clue in the red-penciled passages, certain of failure from the start. Too often he had begun the futile work, had sat with hammering temples over the mold stained pages, without the slightest sense that went beyond the printed word.

This time, too, he fared no better, and after hours of pondering and interpreting, he angrily threw the book on the table.

With burning eyes and overtired he walked up and down the room. Suddenly, he noticed something that immediately put him into the highest state of excitement.

The book had fallen so that it lay open. A single page had not turned over, but was standing up. The lamplight shimmered brownish through the paper. And in the middle of the dull glow of the translucent page shone bright gold dots.

He rushed over, looked more closely. Yes, that had to be it! Under individual letters of the lines, the paper was pierced with a fine needle. Through these tiny gaps the lamplight went and betrayed them.

The solution! This could be the solution! With a feverish hand he smoothed the page. The letters marked with the pinprick belonged to lines of the paragraph in which the instructions for the crab joke were given. And this paragraph was marked in red in the margin.

Violently Peter reached for ink and paper, opened the first of the highlighted instructions and dipped the goose quill. It flickered before his eyes. It was not always easy to find the stitch that had gone hard through the paper under each letter. But with attention, he managed not to overlook it. Letter after letter lined up on the just white writing paper, and at last the sentence stood clearly before him, which his lost uncle had left as the only message:

“If you want to reveal the secret, penetrate into the interior of the mountain. The stream shows the way to the brave.”

Deeply moved, he sat before what his pen had written. Was death really at the end of the path? Had his uncle gone this way?

The thought of brooding in sleepless night was unbearable to him. Quickly he turned off the light and crept out of the house. Slowly he felt his way in the moonless, cloud-covered night to Federspiel’s hut, which lay there quietly and darkly. Nothing could be heard but the murmur of the stream, which for ages had been tumbling from the mountain into the valley.

After a long creeping and searching, he found above a pile of brushwood the small window behind which the hunter slept. Quietly he knocked.

In the room there was a sigh, a slur, like those who are sometimes startled out of a deep sleep. The bed creaked.

“Is that you, Sylvana?”

“Me, Storck,” cried Peter half aloud. “I must speak to you at once.”

Slowly the hunter got up, went to the door, The latch slid back with a clang. Choking haze was in the parlor. Steel sounded on stone, snakes of sparks crept in the sponge, and a blue flame sizzled with acrid stench. At last the oil sparkle burned.

Peter carefully closed the door, hung the hunter’s wool coat in front of the window, and walked up to the sleepy man who blinked wearily into the yellow light.

“I have found the secret,” he said quickly. “I’ve got it!”

Federspiel’s eyes flickered open. “Is it true? Is it not a mistake?”

Peter pulled out the written, stained leaf and held it up to the light.

Only at dawn, after long and careful peering, Storck left the hunter's hut. Unseen and unmentioned, he reached the Zeitlanghof. The roosters crowed as he stretched out on the cool linen of his bed.

“Now it must happen,” Federspiel had said.



## SECTION TWENTY

Two mornings later they moved out cautiously. The sky was cloudy. A weak rain had fallen the day before and fog was stretching around the giant heads of the mountains. When they reached the creek bed, it was four o'clock. It was hard going at first, and Federspiel groaned every time he had to take a jump with his still aching foot. And there were jumps enough to make. From stone to stone, the path had to be found on the edge of the roaring water that filled the bottom of the gorge. More than once the injured man swayed when his ankle threatened to fail. They were both wet up to the belt from the splashing spray. Almost by force Peter had to take the limping man's backpack, in which were ropes, hatchet, candles and rations. But after several hundred steps, a narrow but well-preserved path appeared next to the stream, high enough to be passable even during the swelling of the flood.

Federspiel stopped at the beginning of the trail and pointed up the gray dripping-wet rock face.

"It's just as I thought. From up there a convenient trail zigzags down, the beginning of which is hidden in thick juniper bushes all the way up. Try it and go up a little way."

Peter obeyed, climbed up for a while, and saw how the path led upward in the same twists and turns. He turned to descend, got stuck with the inside pocket of his open jacket on a thorny bush and tore himself away. A fine sound, that came from abruptly severed threads, became audible to him. But he did not take time to look at the damage.

"You were right. An almost comfortable climb..." he reported to the waiting man.

"This is the path where the fire spirits descend into the gorge. Up there you can see the lights at the time of the equinox. And not far from here you shall see where Laubober, terribly battered, was found in the gorge."

"He said something about devils..." Peter recalled Christian's account.

"Two devils blasted me down over the wall,' that's what he said. Hornauss knows for sure. Two devils! He also says that Laubober was

neither a fool nor a coward, and if he said two devils, it will have been two devils. And to these devils, Herr Storck, we want to get on the scent.”

He shouted it loudly in Peter’s ear to drown out the roar of the stream that roared past them, then wordlessly pulled a double pistol from his jacket pocket and showed it to its companion.

“A little doggie that can bite has to be in the bag for this sort of thing!” he shouted.

They went on. The gorge became narrow, the high rock walls moved together, and between them, high above, the rainy sky stood as a narrow gray band. The trees that stood at the edges of the terrible ravine stood out against it, feathered in black. Something red flitted in front of them in the gorge, then disappeared. A fox, which probably had its den here.

And at last they stood before the enormous gate from which the stream thundered. A terrible force seemed to have split the mountain here in primeval times. The masses had collapsed again after the quake that tore them apart, but had not been able to close the crack in the body of the mountain. Then the raging water had probably swept away the debris to create a free path for itself, rolled the obstructing blocks down the valley, twisted and ground them in its eddies. A high, wide gate had remained, consisting of two enormous pieces of rock, which leaned with the upper edge against each other. In spite of their heaving heaviness, they trembled under the incessant impact of the water that hit their foundations.

There was no speaking here. The words died out in the thunderous roar that came from that maw. Black and eerie, the entrance to the underworld lay before them and dusty haze wafted out of the deep darkness.

Federspiel pulled out a lantern from the backpack Peter was carrying, and after a few attempts he managed to light the candle between the greenish glass panes. The tinder had become damp in the wet mist of the gorge. Flickering faint light illuminated a little of the damp glistening walls of the passage and fell on the narrow path that continued here. With an excited wave, Federspiel pointed to footprints visible in loamy places.

After a short hike, it blew tepidly from below. The hunter knelt down, signified Peter to do the same. They held hands in the passing water. It was warmer than outside, and the farther they got, the clearer it became that somewhere warm springs flowed into the stream.

Step by step, often stopping to look at everything, the hunter led the way. Once the yellow light lingered on a semicircular, quiet basin with clear

water. The edges were covered with glassy stalactites, and on the shallow bottom moved slender rose-colored newts with sluggish delicate legs, frail-looking little animals, and cave creatures, never seen.

A side passage opened up and Federspiel stood still, perplexed. Then, however, he pointed with violent gestures to an ore ring completely covered with green rust at the beginning of this tunnel, in which the remains of a charred pine chip still stood. Here the path was all at once broad and of fine sand, marked with innumerable traces of footsteps. Large and small feet, nail shoes and women's soles had made their mark on the soft ground. The side walls seemed to have been worked long ago with a pickaxe. The roar of the water that rushed past the mouth of the passage weakened with every step they took, and at last became a ringing and humming sound that could be heard like a distant low choral chant.

"We are on the right track," Federspiel said half aloud, pointing to the remains of pine torches that lay heaped in a side alcove.

"They rise from above, go down into the gorge with the fires and then go this way."

Peter made no reply. He was in a state of unbearable tension. This, then, was the secret path taken by the wanderer, the pitch collector, the Fentor brothers and oh, also Julia with little Sylvana on the nights of the equinoxes that only happened twice a year. The missing Martin Storck might have come this far and even further before he entrusted his secret to the old book. And Julia...? What magic lay in these secret meetings that was able to lure her, the pure one?

Suddenly, unexpectedly, a large square cave chamber opened up in front of them. Federspiel raised the light toward a part of the wall that shone white, and drew back with an exclamation of astonishment. Quickly Peter stepped to his side and then stood paralyzed, staring.

In the faint light of the tallow candle, enlivened by the flickering flame, two human images rose from the monotonous dark gray of the rock face, looking out of empty eyes: The wanderer and Julia. Shock and horror seized Peter's heart.

But the very next second he recognized the work of an artist, two half-hewn effigies, carved from noble, lightly tinted marble: the funerary monument of a Roman soldier in splendid armor and of a girl leaning lightly against his armored shoulder, bust images, through supreme

perfection feigning life. Beneath the two, on a smoothed slab, was engraved an inscription perpetuating the couple's name and status:

AEMILIAN. SAGITTAR. TRIBUN. LEGION. I. NORICUM ET FILIA JULIA.

"A grave," Federspiel whispered, overcome by the shivers of the place, and pointed timidly to two stone urns in a small chamber beneath the monument.

"Ashes...!"

Peter's gaze lingered in painful sensation on the heads so unlike and yet similar to each other. Beside the hard, furrowed and sharply marked head of the old tribune, next to the indomitable will that had formed those features and the narrow lips, was the noble, classically beautiful face of the virgin daughter, with the proud and yet so soft mouth, the gentle curve of the cheeks and the clear forehead, who looked immensely lovely. On the armored chest of the warlike old man was depicted the snake-haired Medusa, as if the contrast was to be emphasized even more.

"Aemilianus Sagittarius, tribune of the first Norse legion, and his daughter Julia," read Federspiel. "It is strange that the living can resemble these who have long since turned to ashes."

"Julia..." Peter's voice sounded choked. Helplessly, he stretched out his hands to the motionless marble image.

"I dread this place..." whispered Federspiel. "It is not good to linger here."

But Peter did not move, looked rapt with wide eyes... Federspiel grabbed him, called him by name, shook him. Peter was startled, heaved a deep sigh and said: "We have to go..."

They turned away from the ghostly heads and continued to look around. There were, they now realized, other urns resting in this burial chamber...

"Venator" was written on a narrow stone, and involuntarily the same word came to both their lips: Fentor. It sounded as if the old Roma word had gone through a simple transformation in the course of time. Ghosts slept here, awoke at times, left the burial caves, ventured as far as the village and lived there among the people.

They found a kind of stone altar on one wall, almost chest high, which had the image of a lion-headed man. Perhaps one had here the shadows of the dead in ancient times.

For the rest, the room was completely empty. No exit seemed to continue the tunnel through which they had come. From one of the four walls, opposite the opening of the tunnel, an unhewn boulder protruded, separated from the surface of the wall by narrow crevices.

“Let me see the portraits once more time,” Peter was about to say.

But the hunter’s face suddenly took on an expression of tense attention. A warning hand gesture commanded silence. Then Federspiel flinched violently, wetted his fingers with lightning speed, reached for the wick so that the candle flame went out with a hiss, grabbed Peter fiercely by the arm, dragged him in the darkness behind the altar and pressed him down.

Here they crouched and Peter heard the barely breathed word, “They are coming...”

A bright glow of light, narrow as a knife blade, luminously framed the boulder in the wall, wandered in the space of the burial chamber, widened. A whirring sound became audible, a rolling followed by a dull thud, as if stone falling on stone. They did not dare to move. Immediately afterwards both of them saw a man walking toward the opening of the tunnel through which they had entered.

It was the wanderer. They could see him clearly by the light of the earthenware lamp he held in his left hand. He wore the short red cloak in which Peter had seen him before, short leather pants and coarse stockings. His right hand clasped the long and sharp iron-tipped staff.

Upright, rigid-faced, fearfully resembling the stone image in the wall, he strode past the altar, and was immediately swallowed up by the opening of the tunnel that led to the outside.

Concerned, Peter had heard an increasingly violent moaning of the hunter next to him. But only after the old man’s footsteps had long since faded away and probably already the murmur of the wild water filled his ear, Peter, who still did not dare to move, felt a movement at his side and guessed from the muffled, shaking sounds that were now rising that Federspiel was pressing his face into his hat, which had been thrown to the ground, in the manner of a hunter, in order to ward off a bad coughing fit.

Only after a considerable time was the exhausted man able to relight the extinguished candle. He was deathly pale, thick drops of sweat shone on his forehead, and the green hat showed dark wet spots.

“That it didn’t rip my chest apart...!” he gasped. “If he had stopped, I should have been murdered,” he groaned out with a heavy breath, spitting

once more blood-dark sputum into the sand.

“He would have speared us. I took a good look at his arms. Old as he may be, he has terrible strength. But where did he come from so fast? I heard him, saw the light over there.... By the blink of an eye too late, and we would have been face to face with him.”

Alerted by a soft crackle, Peter noticed that the other was resting the cocks of his double pistol, which he had earlier apparently silently understood to raise. Then the hunter shone the light on the stone block.

“That’s the door!” he said after futile rattling and groping. “He entered through that one.” Again he struggled; however, the heavy stone block did not give way not by a hair’s breadth.

“So we must be content this time, the further way is barred to us. But we will still go it, by all the tribunes, devils and fire spirits!

If we could pass through, we would stand on the green meadow in the chamois garden...”

“Do you think so?” asked Peter, to whom this assertion seemed a bit too bold after all.

“So you don’t remember that Anderl and I saw the wanderer down there? Now I know that he didn’t descend over the gruesome Schellbock wall. And I’m sure that the two of us will get to the very place from which the old man came.... on his way! We will go behind him and soon.”

“It may cost your life...”

“Then I’ll be dead a few months earlier,” replied Federspiel with cruel jest.

“But away from here now, before any others come.”

“I want to look at the statues once more,” Peter begged, reaching for the lantern.

“Not at all, Herr Storck!” the hunter refused. “Such things are not good for man. For myself it is as if from the darkness that crouches in the corners, eyes are looking at us, old, evil eyes...! Let’s go!”

Without turning back to the pleas of his friend, he walked with a swaying lantern towards the corridor. Soon the roar of the water deafened them again. Silently lay the basin with the narrow newts. Cold drops fell from above, working patiently, in thousand-year spans of time, on the gleaming white and yellow icicles of stone that hung down from the ceiling. The humidity of the air made the hikers shiver.

Far ahead, a bluish star appeared, widening with each step and becoming a rock gate leading to the open air. Only outside, after long peering, Federspiel extinguished the miserable light to let the foul odor of the dying wick drift away. When they had climbed up from the creek bed far below, they stopped to rest.

“The terrible resemblance!” Peter said more to himself.

“Dead people who live on...”

“Beware of superstitious thoughts, Herr Storck!” briskly warned the hunter. “Think of Christian! One must not give in when the horror wants to come. Such a stone image can easily look like a person whose face one carries in one’s mind all the time anyway. And faces like that of the old Roman and the wanderer are often found in this country. Such men with hawk heads look like each other. I know, I know: it is tempting to lose oneself in abysmal thoughts, to become intoxicated with the strange and mysterious. But the bright mind must always remain on top because of this, or man will become more and more entangled in his delusions of wonder and will finally no longer know the difference between dreaming and waking. One must defend oneself, Herr Storck, be on guard against everything that clouds the mind. If things were different for us, we would probably not be sitting here and still be believing in fire spirits like the people of Sankt Mareiner. And just as this haunting with the fiery poor souls before us has come to naught, all the miracles and ghosts will be dissolved, if one only shines it bravely in the face and does not allow oneself to be deceived by the base woman’s soul that sits in all of us.”

But Peter was too deeply agitated to be reassured by this well-meant advice. In spite of the bright day, he felt as though unknown forces were drawing tighter and tighter loops around him, as if a doom lurked in the gloom of his previous experiences. Something terrible stood between him and his beloved, threatened defeat and death, some inconceivable thing that could not be dealt with by understandable considerations. His saddened gaze was fixed on a tuft of strange pale grass, which grew out of a small round hill not far from them among the heather. What kind of stalks might these be, lying so thin and silvery on one another?

“What kind of grass is that.... the white one there?” he asked the hunter, who was leisurely eating bacon and bread.

The hunter looked and his face contorted.

“Rag!” he muttered, and then shouted loudly, “Hey, don’t you want to get up? I see you well, old spy!”

Then the tuft of grass started to move, an old head with two piercing eyes lifted up, and a toothless mouth grinned, “Just had a good nap!”

It was Rangger Blasi.

“Go!” Federspiel mocked. “That there is the place you have chosen?”

The pitch collector stood up rustling in his shiny armor and said, as if he had heard nothing:

“So early at night? Whence, whither, may one ask?”

“You will not be curious any longer!” answered the hunter.

“We were in the bird corn over there.” And he pointed in the direction toward the Hockauf.

“So the wind blew this on the path that goes down into the gorge,” grinned the pitch collector, pulling from his pocket a torn silk tassel, apple green and peach red.

Peter was startled and reached for his Franconian pipe; the silken adornment was missing. Now he knew why he had been caught in the shrubs by the path he had climbed at Federspiel’s behest, and what had snapped with a faint sound.

Federspiel watched darkly as Blasi placed the colorful tassels in Peter’s hand and smiled:

“The gentleman will have to take better care next time. Strange, strange! The valley wind has been blowing all morning, and yet the thing has flown down.” A grumbling giggle made his wrinkled head wobble.

“You worry about many things that are none of your business!” the hunter hissed.

Then the old man, who seemed to be exquisitely amused, slapped his hand on his reflective leather trousers and sang in a thin crooning voice:

“Convent woman in the snail shell  
Thinks she is hidden.  
There comes the Father Quardian  
And wishes her good morning!”

He gathered up his faded hat from the ground, plopped it on his white hair, and walked with stiff knees in the direction of the pitch collector’s hut. Angrily the Hunter watched after him.



“They’re bloody careful!” he muttered to himself. “It’s going to get serious soon with the spirits and me.”

They spoke no more and parted at the entrance to the village.

## SECTION TWENTY-ONE

Unable to think of anything other than the strange adventure in the cave and the uncanny resemblance of the stone images, Peter lay resting on his bed for hours. How hopeful and how close to the solution he had felt after he had gone out with the hunter after solving the secret in his uncle's old book, which had remained hidden for so long! Now the veils had multiplied, and the hope of ever lifting them had diminished even further since the discovery that those to whom it applied were on their guard.

The next days, in which Federspiel was not visible, passed in dull musings. Ten times he went down to the village; there he stared up at Julia's closed window. But Julia was far away, and even a brave decision to confide in her completely and to force her to explain the incomprehensible was not possible at present. In vain he tried to persuade himself that it was only his over stimulated nerves that had given him a resemblance between the marble girl and the living Julia. Certainly, at all times he saw the lovely face of the beloved one before him. But the shock with which he recognized the beautiful stone face gleaming in the dim lantern light as a perfect copy of Julia's features had been too strong to be dismissed as a deception by subsequent considerations.

At moments he was close to despair. Never, never would he succeed in penetrating this confusion of riddles to calm clarity. And perhaps it was better not to know anything about the uncanny that had a place in these immense forests and dark mountain caves....

Yes, and what was it about the described leaf of paper that had accompanied the book? For what reason had Martin Storck written those individual sentences, torn out of a greater context about examples of possession? Was this a place where damned souls lurked to find a new dwelling place in human bodies? The nun down there in the valley, the Rose innkeeper, from whom at times the shot drummer boy spoke and laughed.... And it occurred to him that the hunter had told him about a strange painting in the chapel of Sankt Mareiner.

He immediately set out and went towards the little church. The rusty iron door of the churchyard creaked as he opened it. When he passed the

charnel house, he felt like looking at the skulls on display. Behind crossed iron bars they stood, stacked one on top of the other, differently shaped, with bright teeth and fused mummified jaws. Some of them were adorned with wreaths of painted roses and inscribed with pious sayings on white forehead bones. In the center of the small vaulted room stood the bier of the community, and around it the gravedigger had piled up his wood for the winter. Peter stepped out into the sunlight again and walked between dilapidated graves and crooked crosses towards the chapel. The door was open, next to it the greasy bell rope hung from the ceiling. On the gold-cluttered altar were jeweled pyramids of blue, red, and violet paper roses, and between them the emaciated, blood-crowned Savior bowed his thorn-crowned head, dying. The colored glass panes of the windows threw friendly spots of color on the prayer chairs. And not far from the altar hung the image rich in form that he had come to see.

In the midst of a poisonous green meadow, out of which grew in the background of the painting faithfully depicted the same little church in which he stood, knelt, accompanied by two peasant dressed men and a woman with a large hood, a very young girl in ancient black and red costume, and in front of her a priest in a white surplice and yellow stole raised a cross, while the left hand held a small black book with a red cut, the index finger clamped between two pages. In the circle, uniform in costume and facial expression, stood many people, men, women and children with hands folded in prayer. From the mouth of the possessed girl came a wild-bristled little monster, like a hairy and winged seahorse, in a puffing cloud of blue smoke and yellowish flames. The inscription was scarcely legible, and it was only after a long effort that Peter was able to glean from it so much that the Christian virgin Lidwina Lergetpohrer had been redeemed here from a devil called Zorboth, who had taken up residence in her quarters, on July 6, 1682 and that the parents had donated this picture in eternal memory.

For a long time Peter stood in front of this crudely painted representation, from which the paint was crumbling off. This unfortunate child had been a Lergetpohrer, no doubt sprung from the ancestral line of the innkeeper of the Rose. How strange that now a man of the same clan suffered from a similar disease of the soul and thought to carry a foreign guest in himself! Was everything said with the word disease"? The fact that Christian made speeches, as they corresponded to the imagination of a

Bavarian drummer, the song he sang with a loud boy's voice on the nights of his agony, all these circumstances still held a residual of mystery that could not be explained so easily. Even if, as Federspiel rightly demanded, one could not willingly give oneself over to superstition, it was nevertheless difficult to simply dismiss these questions. And if unknown powers were playing their game here, was it not also possible, that the soul of that tribune of the Norse legion, who had long since turned to ashes, dwelt in the wanderer, and that of his daughter in Julia?

But then Peter laughed at the aberrations in which he caught his spirit. Where was he going to end up if he indulged in such notions? Was it not already insanity to occupy himself with such thoughts at all? Superstition had a contagious effect, he knew that well. What was living in the prejudiced souls of the people here, constantly nourished by fear of the inexplicable, fortified by the lack of knowledge about the thousand possibilities of mental disorders, was certainly inherited from one sex to another to create a faith, which was not easily shaken, imperceptibly combined with the faith of the church and, as it were, drew nourishment from sacred sources.

It was probably also due to the high mountains, which like rigid guards enclosed the small world here, to the gloomy black-green forests, which were full of voices at night, the wind that came down from the yoke and howled around the windows. Peter had never experienced such dark nights as here, never seen the pale moon so lurking and peering. No, it was just a matter of being out in the wide and cheerful world, to move in the glow of bright and festive chambers, to hear merry laughter and to be above all this. Yes, when was the last time he had himself laughed from the bottom of his heart?

He left the haunted church and looked around the cemetery, in whose remote corners lay rotten pieces of coffin and broken, green-mossy bones.

On a fresh burial mound crouched Anderl Kinigadner and jerked up startled at the rustling sound Peter's feet made in the long grass.

"It's me, Anderl!" said the approaching man compassionately, "You don't always have to sit on your father's grave, boy. It's not good for you!"

The young red-cheeked Anderl had become pale and gaunt and his eyes looked unsteady.

"I must watch," he murmured, looking around shyly. "So the evil enemy can't get to it!"

“Your father has long been in eternal bliss and does not need your watching!” Peter contradicted him. “Father Archangelus also said it!”

“It is not for certain...”

Again the beads of the rosary rolled through the boy’s skinny fingers and his lips whispered.

“Don’t you go hunting with Federspiel anymore?” asked Peter.

Anderl nodded.

“Until he goes to the fire-spirits. Then I have to go with...”

Peter was startled. How did the lad know about these things? He confronted him, not exactly friendly.

The young Kinigadner smiled sheepishly.

“Once when you were talking to Serafin, I was lying on the bench behind the stove, and Serafin had forgotten about me. Then I heard that you wanted to go after the fire spirits with him when the time came. And I made up my mind, that I’m with...!”

“You heard wrong!” Peter tried to deceive him. “You dreamed that!”

But Anderl only shook his head softly and began to say an Our Father in a loud voice.

So this boy also knew about their plan. And probably others as well.

The next morning Peter received an unexpected visit. A few unknown shaggy peasants under the leadership of Hornauss rumbled into the Zeitlanghof and dragged the heavy Organ for the Dead, the blunderbusses and everything else that belonged with them into the cellar.

But when they had finished their work, they asked, not overly politely, for wine and food, trotted up the stairs without asking, and made themselves comfortable in the library. Peter complied, although the foul smell of the vat tobacco they smoked and the spitting on the floor were anathema to him. When he rebuked one of the journeymen for spitting, the latter grinned at him and said:

“My dear fellow, you won’t do anything with us with that bossy nature. We peasants are not as stupid as we used to be, and the emperor in his castle is also a peasant and the townspeople have to do what he does. So your house will not be noble any more. But you need not be afraid because of that, we are not robbers. The wine you have in your cellar was probably grown by a peasant, and the sow from which the sides of the bacon hang in your smokehouse was certainly raised by a peasant. So you mustn’t be proud of those who have to feed and nourish you big-headed people.”

And Hornauss, who himself did not seem to be entirely comfortable in this circle, winked at him:

“Don’t rebel. They are bad people.”

In reality, they were harmless except for their irritable speeches, ate and drank modestly and soon left.

“They just want to be respected once in a while, the peasant people,” said Hornauss as he left.

Nevertheless, an uneasy feeling remained in Peter. He didn’t like it anymore on the lonely Zeitlanghof.

In reality, it was the consuming longing that had tormented him for days. Since Julia had left, despite the beautiful early autumn the whole area had seemed repulsive and gloomy to him. Deep down, he knew well that the fire spirits had long since made him feel more uncomfortable, not so much for the sake of his disappeared uncle, but because of their relations with the beautiful girl. The excessive simplicity of his way of life, the lack of any stimulation and entertainment was little suited to his spoiled youth, which naturally longed for other circumstances. And what had seemed bearable to him as long as he knew his beloved was near him, now suddenly seemed to him to be the epitome of joyless renunciation. The incident with the peasants, who had shown themselves from an entirely new and quite uncomfortable side, filled him completely with displeasure.

Who on earth forced him to sit idly here and wait until some coincidence led Julia back to Sankt Marein? And all of a sudden, with boiling fright, he was overcome by the thought that she might not come back at all. How, if she was used to or forced to spend the fall and the winter season in the capital?

Only a quick decision could save him from the doubts that had attacked him like a flock of black birds. He had to get to her, to her, before she perhaps left the little town as well, and it had become impossible ever to find her again. There was no over thinking in a matter to which his whole heart hung by a thousand threads.

Without hesitating, he wrote a note to the hunter promising to return soon, packed a small satchel with the necessary things, told the stunned Hirlanda to take good care of the house, and immediately descended into the valley with Anderl, who was carrying his luggage, as if he were afraid that some circumstance might hold him back by force.

“Julia!” it rang in him, as he went down the steep path so quickly that the porter could hardly follow him.

Silver-white threads flew toward him on the valley wind, Indian summer floating along under the paler sun, tangling in the hiker’s hair. The perennials along the path bore elongated fruits, in a group of larches sat hundreds of colorful feather balls, migratory birds that were gathering for the great journey. Oh, it was so nice to come down from the loneliness and narrowness once again into the autumn-colored wide valley from which the white road led to a happier world! He passed by the battle sites, forcibly suppressing the eerie memory of the bloody night of Pontlatz. There under the earth lay probably also such and such a one, whom the bullet from his uncle’s rifle, which he had carried into the battle, had knocked down. No, nothing of the Bavarian officer... Better so, than otherwise.

“I live!” he said aloud, and the lad trotting along beside him looked at him in wonder.

Before he boarded the mail coach, a pathetic, feral crowd approached him unawares, a hollow-eyed ragged person with matted beard, a woman in rags holding a sick infant pressed to her skinless limp breast, and four or five half-naked, bedraggled children who were screaming at each other and pushing each other away. Dirty hands reached out begging.

“Bread, lord, bread!”

“We are from Schwazer,” the man stammered, pointing to his sunken chest.

“Been a big peasant. Is all gone. Burned up all over. Ask the Lord in the name of God and the Blessed Virgin!”

He gave them what loose money he had in his pocket. The peasants of the market looked on impassively; they were used to the sight. There were large numbers of people from the countryside scattered about in great numbers, stealing where they could, scourged by hunger.

## SECTION TWENTY-TWO

A cool wind swept the streets of Innsbruck. Inhospitable, buttoned up, as if crouched in fear, the city lay on the gray Inn River. The shutters were mostly closed, the windows covered. People crept past each other. They were bad days, and every morning brought an exciting newspaper. No one knew what was in store. Certainly not good things.

It was easy to get housing. The hostels were empty. In the Golden Eagle Peter could choose his room. The guest rooms, of course, were full of shouting and boasting militia men and those who pretended to be bold, not at all Tyrolean faces, dialects that were not peculiar to the country. A few citizens sat shyly and gloomily in the corners and spoke quietly and sorrowfully to each other.

The innkeeper did not seem to recognize him. This was a heavy blow to Peter, who had hoped that with the help of the man, who was so friendly at the time, he would be able to locate the home of Julia. Now he knew nothing of her except her first name.

He reminded the innkeeper of the evening when the Bavarian officers had been carousing in the extra room and the beautiful young woman had sought out the wild shaggy peasant in the guest room. The host looked at him from the side, moved his hood sullenly and grumbled, as if the Bavarians had been there evening after evening and the peasants even more than enough. Peter pointed out that he had come from Vienna at that time. But that didn't help either. The man threw him a distrustful glance and said that many things had come from Vienna to the Tyrol and that it had not always been good. With that he left him standing there. The barmaid, too, proved to be inaccessible.

"Many guests have passed through this house," she said briefly.

Disappointed, he left the sad inn and walked under the arbors, finally losing himself in a small narrow alley. At one corner, on an old stepping stone, as they stood for horsemen here and there for easier mounting, sat a miserable woman and raised her brown wrinkled hands. He felt sorry for her in her visible abandonment, and he put two silver twenties in the withered palm:



“The lord is good. But don’t the lord stay in town,” she whispered gratefully. “It is all over, and the Day of Judgment draws nigh.”

Although her poor head seemed confused under the large, mushroom-shaped hood, he nevertheless entered into a conversation with the bent old woman and asked her why he should not stay? She looked at him quite brightly and attentively:

“The peasants know well that many are Bavarian at heart in Sprugg, and they have more than once threatened to do one last dance with the gentlemen. And there is no more government. How can a little landlord from the Pseir valley be able to govern, when kings and emperors have to learn from childhood how to do it, and have not managed to do the right thing either?

But in the midst of the pompous chatter of the wizened old lady, it occurred to him that she, who probably had her begging booth there all day long, might know something about the beautiful black haired Fräulein.

He eagerly tried to describe the person he was looking for, and the old woman listened to him, bobbing her head:

“Is that the one for the gentleman?” she said with a giggle, and a gleam of lust shone from her eyes. “I mean, in the second or third house in Fuggergasse lives such a one with a white face and black hair as the lord is looking for. There’s a confectioner there, and it would be easy to ask him for more.”

She described the way to him, smacking her toothless jaws as if a piece of sugar had fallen into her wrinkled mouth, and nodded behind him with a trembling head.

Hastily striding toward the new destination, he rejoined the broad main street. A couple of burly fellows on heavy nags trotted proudly down the street, sabers clattering at their sides.

“The Sandwirt dragoons!” cried a locksmith’s boy in a leather apron, whistling shrilly on two fingers.

“Take care, Jackele, your horse has lost something!”

One of them brought the stable horse to a halt with a rough crack of the reins and made an effort to ride after the boy who ran hurriedly away with slapping shoes.

Finally Peter found Fuggergasse. Craftsmen’s signs and small stores with dusty goods, yawning dark house doors glided past him. A glass door next to a semicircular window where sweets were swarmed by flies made

him stop hastily. He entered, a tinny bell barked at him, suspended in the doorway. A stolid man in a white apron, his round linen cap on his head, emerged from the background.

“What is the gentleman wishing?” he asked amiably. Not without embarrassment, Peter began to describe to him what he was looking for, and asked if the confectioner was not perhaps where he could take an important message intended for the young lady. He said that he had been directed here.

“That’s right,” the man replied stolidly. “I do believe that the gentleman means our Miss Julia, or, as they say, the Demoiselle Avorai, who lives here on the second floor. She often goes to the Highlands, and people from there come to see her. From the pastoral country as the gentleman describes. It is probably her. So, would the gentleman like to leave the letter or the message with me?”

Peter assured him, delighted in his deepest soul, that he would like to deliver the message himself.

“Well, well!” smiled the white haired man whistling.

“Well, the gentleman will just climb up to the second floor, and he’ll find his way there later. And if I might offer a glass of liqueur... as refreshment...?”

Peter had ginger liqueur poured for him to show his gratitude and sipped it.

“How will it be with us Tyrolese?” the man asked. “Such a gentleman knows more than we do.”

“There will be peace soon, I hope!” replied Peter absentmindedly. “Just the next front door?”

He paid and went out. The one in the white apron obligingly accompanied him out into the street and pointed into the gateway.

“It’s bad here with us!” he sighed talkatively. “But the peasants aren’t the most troublesome. But over there, across the Inn Valley the people, they’re all the same with the empty plunder sacks when it starts to crash. They already robbed me of everything, bakery and sugar factory for a hundred guilders, and I had to watch the riffraff...”

Peter climbed the narrow winding staircase, groping for the leather rope hanging in iron rings. It was almost dark in the corridor of the second floor.

But here, too, chance came to his rescue.

Behind one of the three doors that opened onto the corridor, he heard Julia talking. A melodious male voice answered.

Peter felt a sudden pain. Listening, with his heart beating violently, he stopped. The two voices became lively. They spoke in a foreign language. Peter tried in vain to hear individual words. It was something sad of which the two spoke.

Indecisively he waited. Fräulein Avorai... A strange name it was. In the strange position he was in, he was tormented by the search for some similar sequence of sounds.

But all at once an irresistible desire seized him to put an end to this unworthy standing in front of the door, behind which his beloved was talking to a strange man.

He knocked, perhaps more strongly than he had intended.

Immediately the conversation inside fell silent. A light step approached. The door opened. Bright daylight fell from the opening onto the dark corridor. And in the middle of the light stood Julia, almost unearthly beautiful in a flowing, white robe, which a shimmering belt enclosed under the breast, small black Velvet shoes, fastened with cross ribbons, on the feet. With a single glance, he embraced the deprived, blissful apparition.

“You...!” she cried, and surprise breathed a delicate rose glow on her cheeks.

Behind her stood a slender brownish person with fine features in the costume of a valley unknown to Peter, his tall felt hat in his hand.

“Pardon me!” said Peter, deeply affected. “I am intruding very much, I notice!” Painful anger and jealousy trembled in his voice.

She looked into his honest face, quite incapable of concealing feelings of such vehemence, and blushed again.

Without answering Peter, she whispered a few rapid, unintelligible words to the stranger, who, with a slightly curious smile, eyed Peter Storck, and extended his hand to him.

The man bowed exceedingly consummately, kissed the girl’s fingertips, made a short bow to Peter, which the latter overlooked gravely, measured him once more with polite astonishment, and stepped out into the hallway. Julia closed the door behind him and now faced Peter alone.

“We can’t stand here,” she said then, excitement quivering in her voice as well. “Come in!”

She opened the door of a room. Peter looked around, breathing deeply. The chamber was furnished in an exceedingly simple manner, with fabric-covered chairs and a lounge. A few half size busts, cast in plaster, hung on the blue and white striped walls.

He stammered meaningless apologies under her reproachful gaze, hardly daring to sit down. But the thought of the strange man gave him the courage of disappointment.

“You are angry with me,” he said. “You may despise me for my importunity. But there are things stronger than promises and resolutions. I could no longer stand it without you. I have received my punishment now...” his voice failed him.

“What punishment...” she asked, her eyes widening.

“Julia!” He looked at her flamingly. “Answer me: was it not a Welshman who just left?”

“Since you know...” she said, throwing back her head unwillingly.

“This is how you betray this poor country to its enemies?” he cried out. “Julia, you?!”

The hat escaped from his hand, rolling across the floor.

“I would have preferred that a bullet had struck me and ended my life on the day you waved to me as you left Sankt Marein.

She made a hasty denying motion.

“I won’t betray anyone...” she said quietly and sadly.

“But this meeting... Julia, the country, this poor little brave peasant country is gearing up for the last fight against an overpowering enemy...”

The beautiful girl looked at him long and earnestly.

“The man who came to the country at great risk brought me the news of the death of my mother. And he advised me to leave Tyrol before the Dalmatian regiments, which the Emperor was marching in, had crossed the passes.”

“So your mother...?”

He could think of nothing to say. Helplessly he clasped his hands together.

“You don’t have to comfort me,” she said harshly. “I do not mourn the woman who gave me life. She was an unworthy one, a...”

She bit her lips.

“But what is he to you, the.... the Welsh man?” he suddenly cried out. “Julia, I can’t bear it! There is a fairy tale word that speaks of one whose

heart was burst; It is the tale of the cruel queen...”

His head sank on his chest.

She stepped close to him and lightly put her hand on his hair.

“Dear boy... she whispered.

“He brought me news.... I never saw him before in my life. He is from my home...that’s all. Don’t torment yourself... don’t torture yourself!”

Unable to speak, he bent over her hand and kissed it. She pulled him up to her, their eyes blazing into each other. In a passionate movement she put her arms around his neck, their lips found each other in a long kiss. In sweet pain he felt her small teeth, her hair stroked his cheeks.

“*Eau sunt tien...*” she whispered as then, and a red flame passed through his blood.

Tighter his hands gripped.... She staggered, sank on the daybed.

“Oh don’t...” She cried, pleading, pressing herself tightly against him, and kissing him again and again. “I stood by your bed, dearest...; I kissed you in your sleep...”

Her eyes grew large and wide, her lithe body twitching in his embrace, giving itself, tired of resistance, full of longing for fulfillment. A soft wail made the man tremble in the midst of the storm of senses before he sank into crimson unconsciousness. He awoke distraught, like someone startled out of a deep dream. Midday bells were ringing in the room. The light was bright.

The sudden awakening from the glowing intoxication, the sight of disheveled clothes and half-exposed limbs overwhelmed him like ice water. Something emerged from the mists of memory. Collapsing, he looked at the door as if it had opened a narrow crack, as if a distorted woman’s face looked through in immoderate pain:

“Mother!” he groaned, looking around him in confusion, fully conscious. Tentatively he stroked the displaced garment of Julia, who looked at him with black dead eyes, in which was nameless horror, and at last noticed the disgusting disorder of his own clothes.

“My God!” he muttered. “How had this been allowed to happen? Forgive... forgive me!”

He stretched out his hands imploringly to Julia.

She sat up, grasping her loosened hair, staring before her. Words came out of her mouth...

“I am lost... I am lost...”

Heavy, burning tears ran down her cheek.

“Julia!” he cried. “Speak to me, speak.... talk!”

A pathetic smile crossed her face.

“Go!” she said, “leave me alone!”

He rose obediently, reaching for his hat. “When shall I see you?” he begged. “When, Julia?”

“Never! Never!”

There was no tremor left in her voice.

“Go! Go, if you love me!”

So he went, staggering down the steep winding staircase, standing in the narrow alley, put foot before foot as in a dream.

“Sun-runner...”

Where did the terrible fear come from that descended on him in the midst of indifferent people who were going out of the workshop and the office to eat?

So it had been her that night. From her was the silken black hair that Notburga had found. Her lips had been visible in the blue moonlight that fell through the windows of the Zeitlanghof, touched his mouth, so that he awoke. At a time when he hardly dared to hope, consumed with longing for her.

It was probably his fate to stain everything pure that came near him. A curse had weighed on him since that terrible hour when his mother had looked at him through the half-open door.

New, heavy guilt crushed him. The smell of grease and onion wafted toward him from the door of the inn. What did he want here? Food? He laughed to himself, went down the arcades, and found himself on the Renn street again in front of the yellow building of the castle, at the gate of which two marksmen were earnestly on guard. When he looked up at one of the large windows a man with a round-shaven head and a large full beard stood there, his hands buried in his leather belt. That was probably Sandwirt. The good-natured red face of the commander-in-chief of Tyrol looked serious and troubled. Peter involuntarily tipped his hat and Andrä Hofer nodded to him twice in a friendly manner before turning and stepping back into the hall, from which a cheerful song sung in several voices sounded.

Peter wandered along the rushing Inn, and gradually the remorse receded from him. Thoughts of happiness came, enveloping him like a cloak of gold and silk.

“She is mine...” he spoke to himself. “Everything else is void!”

Passers-by gazed after him, nudging each other. An old liquor brother stepped to his side, winking cunningly, trolled along beside him, and spoke slurringly to him. Peter threw a gift into the greasy felt that wandered before him. Only by the rushing thanks did he realize that he had dropped a gold piece into the hat.

He smiled, his heart blooming like a rose. But then a murmuring voice spoke, coming from the depths of memory, the child’s voice of little Sylvana:

“It is said among those who are knowing:

‘If the purity of the sun-runner is stained, God dies!’”

In sudden fear he ran back, got lost a few times in the alleys of the old town, and at last stood breathing a sigh of relief in front of Julia’s house. But as he was about to enter the front gate, the confectioner, who must have been watching him through the panes of his door, stepped out of the store in a cloud of vanilla scent and called to him, “She’s no longer there!”

“The demoiselle...?” Peter faltered.

“She has departed. A peasant with a small wicker cart came for her.”

“Departed...”

Peter stood stunned before the mischievously smiling man.

“A Welshman?” he cried in his choking suspicion.

The man shook his head slowly.

“Oh no. Not a Welshman, and the gentleman need not be worried. Quite a shaggy black haired highlander and he has been here many times with the lady.”

He hurriedly jumped into the store, came back with glass and bottle: “This is a monastery spirit, especially good for such a shock!”

Peter drank the hot spicy liquor, leaned against the wall. He felt sick to his stomach.

“I know how it is,” said the confectioner confidentially. “Went through the same sort of thing in my younger days, if you’ll pardon me! The gentleman must know that I came as far as Temeschwar in Hungary and on the other side as far as Stuttgart in the Swabia. And for a young journeyman who practices a sweet trade that attracts women, there are enough beautiful girls, and heartache at times. That passes. Time goes by over it.”

Peter broke away from the good-natured talker and walked along the little street.

Now there was only one thing to do: return immediately. The blacksmith Fentor had picked her up. He asked to be shown the post house. After some questioning and searching, he discovered the postmaster in the neighboring inn at the Triumph forte, engrossed in a card game, lost in pipe fog. What? Extra mail to the Upper Inn Valley? Does the gentleman know what this would cost at such times, when there is a shortage of oats? And where on the roads are the militias of Speckbacher and Haspinger marching against Salzburg? And with what kind of money should be paid? Hofer twenties, no one would take Viennese bank notes, Bavarian coins were also uncertain. Soon some would be on top, soon the others.

Peter pulled gold out of his pocket.

“Yes so,” said the old gentleman politely and pulled out the embroidered cap. “This will work. A pleasure to be of service.”

He handed over a couple of red-cheeked silver coins, pennies and twenties, and inscribed his name.

“From where?”

“From Vienna!”

“From Vienna? Respect! The gentleman knows? probably also, what has been cooked up at the armistice of Znaim? It is said that the emperor promised not to help us Tyrolese any more at all.”

Sadness was in the postman’s tired eyes.

“If we had only known that earlier!”

“I’m afraid I don’t know anything about these things...” Peter declined.

Just to be alone, just to know again that every hoof beat of the horse brought him closer to the one his heart longed for.

“So so. Don’t know? Afterwards it will be like this! The emperor has enough other countries. Because of the few peasants and students who are lying under grass and stones, the food at Schönbrunn will not taste worse than usual. And in the meantime, the devil himself will get us!”

“Is such evil to be expected?”

Peter was now struck by the old man’s hopeless bitterness.

“After all, there is no enemy in the country...!”

The postmaster took a pinch from the tortoise shell box and said, “Maybe. But we hear from the postal servants how it looks. A heavy storm is rising, they say. Bavarians and Frenchmen will come, more than mosquitoes in summer. Yes, yes. As I have always said: We should have left



it alone with the Bavarians, so we would have saved ourselves for the French.”

Peter had to think of Pflederer’s letter; of Federspiel ... They had said the same thing.

“The coach will be ready at six o’clock in the morning,” the old man said goodbye.

At six o’clock in the morning! In despair, Peter walked back along Maria Theresienstraße.

There was a crowd at the column of St. Anne. A troop of armed men gathered there, half boys still, a few men, and some old people. A bottle of red wine went in circles; loaves of bread were packed into the rucksack. The shot of a carelessly handled rifle cracked, drove the singing bullet over the roofs.

“Oh, you bovine animal!” one of them laughed. Pale with fright, a sixteen-year-old stood, the smoking gun in his hands.

Next to Peter was a bent, white-haired old man in a bright red shooting jacket, looking at him with bright, sharp vulture eyes:

“It will never work, Herr. My bones hurt too much!”

“You have to come, Aubrigger Hies!” interfered one with two white cock feathers on his gold-trimmed hat. “Haven’t you got the real Luke letter in the sack? And shoot like you do.... Not a bullet goes astray there.”

“All right, all right,” muttered the old man. “But stop the bouncing...”

“I’ve seen for myself how Hies pulls the bullets out of his robe. He’s a frozen man, lead won’t hurt him. What is it, Herr? Will you come with us?”

He laughed hoarsely.

Peter went away. A whistle whirred after him, laughter, and a word he did not understand.

By the evening crackling candle in the guest room of the Golden Eagle, the lonely man heard much of the heavy worries and fears that weighed on the Tyrolean’s. My God, did it never end, the slaughter and strangulation? The people were so tired, so devoid of hope, the estates were falling into disrepair. The misery increased from day to day. The boys had become wild, outgrown every form of discipline, and the inflation was unbearable. All kinds of ragamuffins rose up, became saucy and rapacious. The touching stories of how the emperor cried and how Archduke Johann fell on his

knees so that he would be allowed to fight at the head of the Tyrolean's, were no longer convincing.

And the worst thing was that in the south twenty thousand militia ran away when the French General Peyri came along with four thousand men. It was a miracle that he now took so long to advance.

There was also talk that the Bavarian king wanted to reconcile with the Tyrolese. But Napoleon would not allow it. They had given Hofer a golden chain of grace from Vienna and several thousand ducats. What about the gold? What? Who had seen anything of the gold foxes? The Passeirer perhaps. One of them said venomously that Hofer was a fine spinner. But immediately the others fell upon him and told him to talk about Sandwirt, who was an honest man. The poisonous hedgehog sneaked out of the door.

“Bavarian rascal!” they shouted after him, subsequently raging with anger.

But in the angry words there was a quiet undertone of heavy sorrow.

Yes, now they probably all thought the way Federspiel had always thought.

After a sleepless night, Peter left. Through a wonderful September day, the carriage drove along the foaming Inn, accompanied by white clouds on a blue sky, which the east wind let sail into the highlands. The stagecoach driver sometimes blew funny and melancholy tunes, was a cheerful fellow who seldom reached for the whip. Heavy thoughts went with him, and what he saw did not cheer Peter up.

Three or four armed gunmen, sometimes more, met the little carriage, which rolled along so easily, looked serious and death defying, and most often also saluted according to the old custom of the country folk. Once Peter passed through a resting group of militia, from which figures hurriedly detached themselves and limped, screaming with waving rags as they ran after the vehicle.

In a place where Peter spent the night, he had to pass a sharp interrogation. Peasants came threateningly to the table where he was sitting. That he was a Viennese who wanted to go to Sankt Marein; the people did not like it at all.

“Who is this guy?” asked a sharp commanding voice.

A well-dressed gentleman pushed the jostling peasants apart and stepped up to the table.

“The word of the gentleman, if he is a man of honor, will speak for me!” said Peter, glowing.

The stranger bowed.

“I am the Count Hendl, and am at your service!” he said. “For as soon as it is proved that we are dealing with a righteous man. Not before!”

But Peter received unexpected help.

“Wasn’t the gentleman with us at the Pontlatz bridge, when one of my friends had to give up the ghost? Kinigadner?”

“Was standing next to him,” Peter answered.

The peasant looked at the count. He stepped hastily toward Peter and called out, “So I must urgently ask, my lord, to excuse me! If I had permission, I would sit down at the master’s table!”

“The privileged do nothing to each other,” growled one in the background. “They stick together all the time.”

“The same wouldn’t help much, you sticking together,” said the one who had recognized Peter. “But the gentleman there has blown a Bavarian officer off his horse so beautifully that my heart laughed inside my body. There’s nothing to talk about!”

The peasants withdrew to a corner, and the speaker told them a number of things about the day at Pontlatz Bridge, in which he had participated.

“I was a student, too, years ago,” laughed the count. “And the way you found the fellow as a fan, that pleases me exceedingly.” Peter had to smile in spite of his sorrow.

“I’m full up with worry,” the count said. “It’s by the skin and hair. It’s coming badly, - Herr... how did you say...? Herr Storck? Von Storck? No? Herr Storck then.”

He whispered across the table, “The Tyrolean’s can’t take any more, that’s what. It’s no wonder when you know what the poor people have endured. And nevertheless: It must be! Even if they don’t respect Speckbacher’s running slips and call Haspinger a fool’s monkey.... they have to! The devil is coming, Napoleon himself!”

“They talk very despondently in Innsbruck...” interjected Peter.

“Believe it.” The count’s face twitched. “I’m scared and frightened, too. And Vienna? I knew the Archduke Karl well, the hero of the German nation, and I left Vienna because I was overcome with horror at how the noble man was repaid for his services. He is too popular, you see. And Andrä Hofer will soon be too popular for those up there, too; and if it will

cost them just one word to save him..., that word, Herr Storck, it will not be spoken!”

Who had said that before? Had it also been Federspiel, who possessed the uncanny gift of recognizing everything earlier than the others?

“You speak very frankly...” said Peter, glancing at the eavesdropping peasants.

“It has overcome me,” replied the count. “It is not always well to make such thoughts explicit. Again, my Herr Storck, I beg you not to think unkindly of me. It may be that I must soon start on the great journey, and I should be sorry if I were to remain in bad remembrance with you.”

Peter shook hands with the stranger. “Let us hope not...”

“Perhaps I am destined to die in bed. Who knows?” laughed the peasant leader. “*Bonne nuit, monsieur!*”

Sounding his spurs, he went out of the room.

For a long time Peter lay awake under a tower of upper beds, despite great fatigue. Two tear-filled, namelessly despairing eyes looked at him. “Never! Never!” said a weeping voice. And as the memory began to blur in approaching sleep, the pale face changed. It was as if he were standing in the library at Zeitlanghof and listened to a sad little song that the forgotten, the abandoned, the other, used to sing:

The fountain runs and rushes  
Beneath the elder’s shrub,  
Where we sat.  
Like many a chime,  
Since heart lay with heart,  
That you have forgotten.

## SECTION TWENTY-THREE

As he had come over the steep path around noon the next day and saw the rooftops of Sankt Marein, it was to him as if, after a long time and many experiences, he felt as if he was returning to the homeland that had faithfully awaited him.

The familiar scene, suddenly hated and unbearable, now felt good again and had an unspeakably calming effect. With angular and round lines, gently arched and wildly jagged, they all still stood there, the Hockauf, the Schellbock, the Black Hen and the Haberer and behind them shone the venerable white crests of the Urtoz and the Wild Man.

His heart beat strongly when he saw the blacksmith scowling and leaning against the door of the house where he suspected his beloved to be. His cautious glance glided over the windows. Was she there? Nothing was stirring above.

In the inn, swarms of flies buzzed autumn-dull and faint around an empty glass, around the sticky rings on the table, and on the bench where Christian Lergetpohrer lay and slept.

His heavy breath went sawingly; his puffy face was colored bluish. The drunkard's hand awkwardly beat at the winged animals that crawled on his sweaty skin. Peter stood at the open window for a while, squinting at the blacksmith's house, coughing loudly a few times. But the Rose innkeeper would not wake up, and no slender hand reached for the latch of the window up there. So he went on and his heart was heavy.

No one else was to be seen. The village street lay empty, only a tabby cat walked across the path, feathery, velvet-pawed, and meowing softly. All colors were soft, golden leaves blew from a birch tree. A delicate reddish tone lay on the woods, and jays cried in the rowan trees. The summer was over.

The Painted Death beside the gate of the Zeitlanghof squinted hollow-eyed, had set his cross pipe to his thin lips and was whistling to himself. No sound was heard, but Peter knew that this evil shadow on the house wall was practicing a terrible melody that would soon sound. Slowly he stepped over the threshold.

Old Hirlanda rushed at him from rattling pots and jar lids. Thank God the master was back! All kinds of idlers would now come up from the valley, quite insolent ones at that, demanding food and drink, letting thieves' eyes go around. Most of them were foreigners, heaven knows from where, Frenchmen and gypsies. The meal would be ready in a moment. Yes, and Federspiel, the hunter, came every day and asked whether the master was still not back? He had something urgent to talk with him about.

Peter went over immediately after a quick meal. Serafin Federspiel looked miserable and suffering, and his cheeks were burning redder than even the graveyard roses. But the smoking pipe hung in his mouth as always and made him cough more than was necessary.

Joyfully surprised, he jumped up at Peter's entrance.

"That's right! I'm glad to hear that! I was already despondent. Have you quite forgotten what day tomorrow is?"

Peter looked at him in amazement.

"Tomorrow?"

"The equinox! The time of the fire spirits! I was beginning to think you'd abandoned me altogether. Well, now that you are here let's do it and finish it, Herr Storck!"

As impatiently as Peter had often thought in the past about the long period of time that still separated him from the autumn day when the fire spirits would have their second appearance in the year, Federspiel's communication now found little resonance in him. Well, the fiery men would again descend to the ravine as they had done back in the Spring, and perhaps it would be possible to see something of them in the vicinity. But what did he care about all that? His uncle had not come back because of that. His thoughts, which circled in burning longing around the blacksmith's house, reluctantly adjusted themselves to Federspiel's plans, which had once been his as well.

"The equinox.... yes, I know..." he said forlornly, absentmindedly picking up a bullet mold that lay on the table.

Had he then thought to find news about his beloved at the hunter?

Federspiel looked at him disappointed and displeased.

"It seems to me that you no longer bear much desire for what has already cost us so much trouble and danger. In the end, don't you want to join us?"

A sullen wrinkle formed on his forehead; almost angrily he took the hollow iron tongs from Peter's hand.

"Now you'll have to talk to me, Herr Storck.

If you want to leave me in the lurch... fine! But out with the language. I am man enough to carry on the matter alone."

"I'll go with you," said Peter. He felt as if a stranger were speaking in his voice.

"There's not much enthusiasm," the hunter scoffed. "It needn't be, if you've changed your mind."

"It's the trip," Peter talked himself out of it; he was sorry for the other's disgruntlement.

"I'll go with you, of course."

"What's the matter with you?" asked Federspiel, looking at him inquiringly.

"You've got wrinkles around your mouth... all at once; the journey has not done you any good, eh?"

"No... not well," Peter said, looking at him. "When do we leave?"

A brighter glow passed over the sick man's face.

"So you're just worn out from traveling. And I've wronged you to within an inch of your life," he said conciliatorily. "Now everything is fine, because you're just along for the ride. I wouldn't have been happy on my own. So listen..."

Puffing and coughing, he lit the extinguished pipe, glanced sharply at the window, then was at the door in one leap and yanked it open.

"You must know I'm being watched," he said more quietly. "The fire spirits are on their guard. Last night Sylvana already came to my window, begged and begged me to let her sleep with me, the young human. She was sent. So I told her that you and I had to go down to the valley early in the morning. They will certainly watch out, and so nothing is of any use but that we descend a little and then follow the stream back again. And during the day we'll stay up there in hiding until they come."

"And if they do not come?"

"It is their day, and they will come as they have always come! And then we'll go behind. I'll get you at first light, Herr Storck!"

One of his terrible coughing fits came over him. "Many an innocent creature have I shot down..." he groaned afterwards, nodding. "Now it's my turn."

As Peter left the house, Anderl stepped out from behind a shrub.

“Can I come with you tomorrow?” he asked abruptly.

His eyes flickered.

“Tomorrow? Where to?” said a hypocritical Peter.

“To the fire spirits...”

Peter forced himself to laugh.

“What are you thinking, Anderl? Tomorrow Federspiel and I are going to Prutz.”

The boy eyed him with his lower lip pushed forward.

“So I’m not allowed to go?” he asked defiantly,

“Now go...” Peter ordered. “You’re crazy with your fire spirits.”

Anderl looked at him hostilely, wanted to say something else, then turned around briefly and went towards the village.

Again Peter, in his anguish of heart, wanted to try to spy Julia. But as he came towards the inn, terrible wailing sounds struck his ear.

At the entrance people were piling up. In their midst stood the young relative of the innkeeper, flapping her hands, screaming at the top of her voice with wide-open eyes in which horror was reflected.

Seized by dull apprehension, Peter went, wanting to enter the house. Hornauss stood there, grasping him by the arm.

“Don’t go in,” he warned. “He looks too bad. He’s blue all over, and his eyes are sticking out.... I’ll have to send a messenger to Notburga in the Engadine, even though I don’t know where she lives.”

“Hanged...?” cried Peter.

“And mouse dead, too,” continued the other. “Just as Rangger Blasi told him. We cut off the rope immediately, but the Soul has already been driven out. And a piece of paper was lying on the table, I have it here...”

He handed Peter a scrap of paper.

“The drummer takes me there...” it said in trembling, heavy writing.

“Where...?” stammered Peter with tears in his eyes.

“In the shed behind the house, and he left the note in the room.”

Horrified, Peter fled to the Zeitlanghof. In the library he found peace. Evening had come, the stars flashed with fine rays.

Tomorrow, he still wanted to honorably pass the adventure with the spirits, of whose fruitlessness he was already convinced. It was possible, after all, that smuggled goods were dragged into the old burial chamber by the light of pitch torches, and it was quite conceivable that they had been



stored in some other hiding place until then. Thus, the reference to the impassability of the Schellbock wall was no counter-evidence. It could have been brought to the caves in other ways and now be picked up.

All this was so unimportant. Even poor Christian's death, strong as the first fright had been, did not linger long. All his thoughts were turned to another destination. In Vienna there were small white country houses, among light green bushes and vineyards, that flamed with roses and jasmine. Happy people lived there, a friendly race, fond of the moment, kind-hearted and understanding in matters of love. There was probably a place for him and Julia. He felt forever attached to her.

At times the gloomy house with the whistling death would like to crumble, gnawed by snow, rain and storm. Was it not madness to trust his young life here?

He was very sorry to have promised the hunter his help. Thus passed a precious day, a day that the beautiful girl might have spent in bitter sorrow. Was it not his most sacred duty, despite her "never," to reach out to her, to dry her tears, to pledge himself to her forever and ever? And could he live, ever be happy again, without possessing her forever?

He stepped onto the balcony and looked out. Stars were shining here, too, but the nights here were even less man's friend than elsewhere.

The treacherous distant rumbling of the white water, the whirring of the wind in the black treetops sounded threatening and hostile. Gloom and depression were the lot of those who lived here. Falling trees killed people, lightning shot blindingly from storm clouds as a killing and flaming sword. Rockfalls and dust avalanches murdered, heavy sledges buried their drivers, snowstorms and icy frost put the weary to sleep in deadly dreams. The earth was stingy and hard, short the summer lust....

And yet! These people fought for this poor land. It was their mother, and because she was poor, they loved her even more. They asked for nothing from the big world. They only wanted that one would let them live peacefully, that one would not touch their pious rigid faith. They were heroes, did not fight for profit, died, great in their simplicity.

In the darkness he undressed and went to bed. For a long time his mind went in agonizing circles around the house of the sinister enemy Fentor. Startled, he came out of slumber in the first gray. A small stone had flown to his window; a short soft whistle announced to him that Federspiel was ready.

He washed, drank some cold milk, dressed and slipped out of the house. Roosters crowed, ravens flew over the pines.

Federspiel was waiting downstairs. Peter's announcement about his meeting with Anderl Kinigadner seemed to frighten him.

"I don't like that boy," he said. "He's always down there with the Capuchin fox. Watch out for him. Don't let him run after us!"

But no one stepped in their way. No one came after them. People didn't get up so early in the fall. Accordingly, like people who have business, they went down the path into the valley.

They might have made about five hundred steps when the hunter made a quick movement, faltering in his forward stride. He uttered a silent curse and flung a stone out of the way with the tip of his foot. Peter looked at him questioningly, but the other winked warningly at him and began to talk briskly from a wisp of red wool that he had to buy from the grocer. At the same time, however, he pulled a small round mirror out of his pocket and held it in the hollow of his hand.

Only after a good while, behind a sharp bend, he stopped, breathing deeply.

"Now he has descended!" he whispered. "And is heading for the village again. I saw it in the mirror!"

"Who?"

"On the crooked pine tree we passed, high above, crouched Rangger Blasi, nicely hidden. I've just caught sight of him, I was startled and pretended to have bumped into the stone. You take good care, you!"

Cautiously, he looked around once more in all directions, examined the slopes for a long time with the glass he was carrying, and only then did they descend to the creek bed.

Soon they were walking below in the shelter of the forest strip that accompanied the stream into the depths. The roaring and thundering became overloud. The water bubbled and foamed, the great mill was going, rubbing sand, splintered wood and boulders together. The tide soothed and boiled, trout leaped after dancing flies, perennials dipped swaying branches into the rushing water.

Then came the jumping from stone to stone, and with difficulty they reached the place in the gorge where the path went down. Here they stayed under cover for a long time and spied out. But nothing showed itself.

The fire spirits were probably still asleep. Cautiously Federspiel pulled Peter after him to a place where dense bushes offered a good hiding place. From here the whole climb through the gorge walls could be seen. A grassy dry spot offered concealment and rest.

“Sleep a little longer, Herr Storck...!” the hunter invited. “I’ll keep watch.”

Peter felt the bad night in his burning eyes and gave in. Federspiel made a camp out of the weather patches, pushed the backpacks under the cloth as a cushion. One could lie comfortably that way.

Quickly the water shower lulled him to sleep. Confused, Peter started up, calmed down when he saw his companion still sitting on the same stone block. Only the area looked different. The bottom of the gorge seemed darker to him, the upper edge of the rock face, which had been bright and dazzling in the sun’s glare, wore a broad shadow stripe. The path, too, lay gray and blurred. Federspiel offered him bacon and bread.

“That’s what I call a good night’s sleep,” he said. “It’s already high in the afternoon, but that doesn’t matter, we have time and sleep was necessary for you.”

“I had a bad dream. About Christian...” said Peter.

“You know how he ended up? Anderl was with me, the boy is completely apart. - Stop!” he suddenly shouted sharply, put the telescope to his eye and looked down the gorge for a long time.

“Now... I could have sworn that there was a head to be seen in the perennials.”

Again he looked for a long time.

“Surely it will be only a bird...”

“I wonder if my uncle was lying in wait like this, too?” said Peter to himself.

“Could be. Who knows? Maybe he’s lying there in the perennials. Nothing could happen to me better after I die than to have my corpse laid out in the forest between air, earth and water, so that it can transform into new life, into blue flies and green grass, into a young fox brood and small ravens, as a feast for roots and cheese-makers. So I would be one with everything I have loved all my life. But they will put me in a dark hole, shovel earth on me...”

He shook with horror.

“And the soul?” said Peter.

“Can’t believe in it,” said the hunter gloomily. “Would be a comfort to me, of course, since I must go so young from everything, from forest and mountain and game, from the women, which I have enjoyed so little, and yet they are sweet as honey and silky-haired like young rabbits. A sick person broods and ponders, Herr Storck, and you must not resent my speeches, you who still have so long to live!”

He gave a small, envious sigh and remained silent. They sat like that for a good while, listening to the water roar and gazing into the increasingly fading light.

The twilight increased rapidly and soon Peter saw the face of his companion only as a bright spot. The outlines up there blurred. From the thicket where they sat, a great snowy owl lifted itself noiselessly, hovered over them, and then somewhere let out a hideous howling laughter that resounded through the roar of the stream like a ghostly call.

## SECTION TWENTY-FOUR

Night came slowly up from the valley. Suddenly, Federspiel's fingers dug convulsively into Peter's arm, the hunter's other outstretched hand pointed upward. At the top of the gorge, where the mountain began, a yellow flame blazed up, slowly floating down. A second, a third, and fourth, and several followed. It could be clearly seen that the lights moved with the stride and leap of the beings that carried them.

The hunter's hand, still clasping Peter's arm, trembled violently, Breathless, in tremendous excitement, Peter watched the train of lights climb down.

The first had reached the bottom, now standing about thirty paces from the eavesdroppers. He was clearly seen stepping out of the bushes.

"The devil!" cried Federspiel in Peter's ear. Peter, too, was terribly frightened. It was the devil. It was the evil one. Hairy fur covered his torso, arms and hands, misshapen legs stomped along the narrow path beside the stream. On its shaggy neck sat a hideous Satanic face with pointed ears, green iridescent eyes and twisted horns.

The heartbeat faltered. A second devil showed himself with thick puffy cheeks, eyes like bright brass, and white-bristled beard, a doe's horns between the floppy ears; pig tusks stood out of his wide mouth.

Peter thought he was dreaming, pinched his arm painfully.

"Wake up...!" he said to himself, fluttering his eyelids.

What was Federspiel doing? He moved his arms, bent over. Ah, he was looking through his little telescope. It wobbled back and forth, finally came to rest.

Suddenly he laughed, hurriedly leaned towards Peter and said:

"They are beards..., Percht runners.... masks they have pre-tied..., hair out of tree beard, eyes of tin leaf, goat horns..."

The huge devil, who had appeared first, lifted the torch high up and looked around very long and carefully. Slowly his ugly head moved in a circle.

"Laubober saw correctly," hissed Federspiel. "Exactly five devils are there..." He laughed soundlessly.

At that moment the leader of the procession took the mask from his face, stripped the hairy fleece from his body.

“Fentor!” said Peter and the hunter at the same time.

Unsuspecting, the people continued on their way. Each one became visible in the torchlight. Seriously and solemnly they walked one after the other. Rangger Blasi, the charcoal burner, strange peasants whom they did not know....

Was Julia among them? The procession passed by them. There were many people, but the girl was not among them. The last one was the charcoal burner’s son.

Soon the two were again in deep darkness. “Up!” Federspiel shouted. “We have to go after them. Stay close!”

Far ahead, the torch fires glowed as points of light, fading into the maw from which the stream roared. Dim red light burst from the grotto. They waited a long time.

Then they slowly approached the entrance, a torch stuck in a crack, glowing.

Then footsteps stumbled behind them. They were startled and turned around.

It was Anderl, his face pale as death. “I won’t stay alone...” he gasped. “Jesus Maria!”

Federspiel’s mouth twitched. His jaw muscles jumped forward as knots. But seeing the horror on the boy’s face, he forced himself to calm down.

“If we all die, it’s your fault,” he then said calmly. “So sneak behind us. And don’t make a sound, or it’s all over.”

Without turning his head once more to the shivering Anderl, he stepped into the corridor, Peter walked excitedly behind Federspiel. What would happen now? Without any obstacle they reached the burial cave. In the light of a torch, which also crackled and smoked here, held by a ring in the rock, they saw into a passage, which the now pushed back stone block exposed. This was where the wanderer had entered at that time, closing the way behind him.

The effigies on the wall seemed to move in the reddish light. A sneer played around the thin lips of the Roman tribune.

Without any hesitation, Federspiel strode on. For a while it went on in the dark corridor. The air was heavy, warm and humid. In the dead silence

that reigned here the slightest sound could be heard. All at once Federspiel uttered a soft call.

He had stepped out into the open. They were standing in a cauldron enclosed by high walls. High, infinitely high above, evening stars shone. Water rushed in the darkness. A veiling fall descended over the wall in front of them, forming a small lake from which whitish mists rose. Large, tree-high shrubs stood in the warm humid air. Peter reached for the leaves, sticky sap lingering on his hand. He tasted with his tongue and felt sweetness. These were the trees that bore red blossoms in summer, alien trees that managed to live in the warm haze, - Giovanelli's rhododendrons....

"The chamois garden," Federspiel said. "We are in the chamois garden..."

It was as humid and hazy as in a greenhouse. Hot springs bubbled here. The air was oppressive and still. Weak light made the falling water shine like silver.

"There...there..." the hunter pointed.

They walked toward the cave that showed behind the fall, slipping in from the side under the spraying curtain. The cave narrowed. Dim light shimmered in the distance.

And then they stood before a musty-smelling thick curtain, through whose slit the light came.

The hunter hesitated.

"We must be daring..." he whispered back, sliding through the cloth.

Peter, with Anderl hanging from his jacket, followed him.

Then they stood still, motionless, frozen with wonder. They were in a spacious rock hall, dimly lit by a few lamps. Many people were gathered here, waiting motionless, completely surrendered. No one turned to look at those who had entered, who remained standing in the deep shadows.

One could not see anything more specific in the light of the sparse little oil flames. The wall opposite the entrance seemed to be a whitish luminous stone slab with indistinctly perceptible figures. In front of it stood a kind of altar on which something glittered. Eerily, the high vaulting blurred in the darkness. On the left, between the motionless waiting people, the black opening of a side tunnel appeared.

A quick, sigh of relief went through the crowd. Sweet and thin flute sounds rang out, touching and simple. The forest spring!!! At the forest

spring a flute sung like this!

Light flitted from the opening of the side tunnel. The sounds came closer. Excitement ran through those present.

“The ravens and the hidden ones...” whispered a voice before Peter, quivering with awe. “The Father is coming...”

The flute notes rose in jubilant two-tone, growing stronger and fuller. Peter recognized them well. It was the charcoal-burner’s panpipe that sang thus.

Two small torch-bearing figures came out of the narrow side gate. Sylvana and an unknown girl of the same age, naked and white, flashing belts around their slender loins. In graceful short dance steps they put foot in front of foot.... Behind them walked the charcoal-burner with the panpipe, dressed in spotted goatskins. His arms and legs were bare, a sword belt held the shaggy doublet together. On the dark curls was a wreath of small white roses. Three equally adorned boys accompanied him.

“The lion...” the voice said again, and shivers of mystery trembled within it.

A giant entered. On the wild hair was a round iron helmet, ring armor was around the leather doublet that let see his terrible arms. His legs stuck in short pants, strap shoes protected the feet. In his hands flashed a bright sword.

It was Fentor, the blacksmith. Anderl was shaking so badly that Peter, despite his own excitement, put his arm around the boy’s shoulder to steady him. Was it whispered prayers or quiet sobs that were audible to him?

“Be quiet... for God’s sake...” he admonished softly.

The torchbearers, the flute player, and the massive sword bearer stopped beside the entrance.

A swelling hymn roared through the cave, “*Nama, nama, sebesio!*”

“Father... Father!” they sobbed aloud, cried out in longing. Arms stretched out. Many bent their knees.

From the side door came an old man. A violent, inexplicable shaking almost forced Peter down to the earth. He felt as if he had to prostrate himself before the one who entered.

It was the wanderer. And yet another, a transformed one. He walked solemnly between the torches; a wide, snow-white robe enveloped him. A royal mantle fell from his shoulders in heavy purple folds; a golden hoop



adorned his high forehead. In both hands he carried a gleaming chalice and raised it in blessing.

All bowed, murmuring a prayer in deepest devotion. Who was that? Where had Peter seen this proud and yet so infinitely kind and mild countenance, this transfigured expression of a godlike soul? Hot love for the unknown old man flowed like blood from his heart. And he realized that on the hard and scornful face of that strange man who twice crossed his path, on the face of that wanderer, the same man who now passed him so royally transformed, there was a faint, barely visible reflection of this other face that had already captivated him so incomprehensibly, had realized that it had been a mysterious, unacknowledged love that had moved him then, despite the dismissive behavior of the incomprehensible one.

Now he saw the one so hostile gloriously changed, detached from the evil resemblance of that cruel and hard soldier's head, transfigured in a heavenly glow that was not of this world.

He felt a touch, it was Federspiel's hand, which, betraying deep movement, sought his, pressing it convulsively. What had the hunter? A tear glistened on his sunken cheek. But there was no way to ask. The eye saw, embraced an image that made everything else sink....

"The sun runner... behold! Oh her," murmured all around. Necks stretched in rapture.

Peter was barely breathing. Julia!!! She entered, dressed in white like the beautiful old man, crowned with gold like him. Her delicate hands held a crystal bowl, in which a blue flame was burning... At that moment, a sea of light flared up.

Behind a great shining ball of glass it flashed first, multicolored lights glowed around her, twelve colors spraying great luminous circles, scarlet, violet, golden brown, deep green, honey yellow, blue of the sky and iridescent water green, milk white.

The figures on the marble slab shone, enlivened by fiery glow. A youth with a Phrygian cap, in a flying cloak knelt on a mighty bull, his short sword raised to thrust.... "*Soli invicto Mithrae,*" was written above it. "To the unconquered sun Mithra."

"Mithra...," Peter thought.

"A temple of Mithra."

Federspiel's heavy breathing was close beside him. But all this he saw only as in a dream, unreal and dim. His drunken eye alone enclosed the

figure of the beloved, her pale face, as she carried step by step the bowl in which the bluish flame flickered....

The old man went to meet her, a bundle of white chips in his hand. A pile of wood stood sledged, beside it shone the chalice, on which lay a slice of bread.

Slowly the priest stretched out his hand toward the sacred flame. Not a breath was audible in the solemn silence.

Then the sun runner seemed to waver, the bowl in her hands tilted, fell, crashed to the floor clinking and splintering. The blue flame went out...

A single terrible cry of anguish resounded, taking with it the single cry of anguish that Peter uttered. The beautiful girl slapped both hands in front of her face and fell to her knees. A plaintive sound came out of her mouth....

Terrible silence weighed on the room. The people stood paralyzed, staring stunned... Then she leaped up, ran towards the side corridor. Her robe brushed the torch that Sylvana carried, dropping it to the ground with a crackle. The dark corridor swallowed the white, billowing dress....

She was no longer pure, was no longer allowed to touch the vessel of the sacred fire....

Deep, paralyzing silence weighed on the people who had cried out so painfully. All eyes were fixed on the old man.

The shavings slipped from his hand with a dry sound. Slowly he turned his head. Deepest sorrow lay on his noble face. With a namelessly desolate movement he hid his face in the sleeves of the priest's robe.

Sobs sounded softly, desperate groans. The face revealed itself, deathly pale and stony. The arms lifted against the sky, imploring, hopeless, the breaking voice formed words:

*"Il dyi ei ischturien ... ei ven ad esser sarain ... ei ven freid ... Dieus mora!"*

The girls thrust their torches to the ground so that they were extinguished and smoking.

"Father!" a single voice cried out in deadly horror.

The old man looked around once more as if searching, grasped with both hands as if in wild convulsion for his heart and collapsed.

Howling dully, the blacksmith rushed toward the lifeless man, lifting him like a child. The old man's arms fell limply; the colored lights were reflected in his open eyes.

Terrible wailing arose, people fell on their faces, and high-pitched screams cut through the air.

A hand seized Peter's arm. "Away! Quickly away...!" whispered Federspiel.

"Desecration...!" a voice screamed.

Eyes blazed, clawed hands reached out to the intruders. A sword flashed...

"Run for your life!" shouted the hunter, violently yanking Peter back.

Frantic with fear, they ran back down the corridor. The boy ran behind them, moaning, half insane with terror.

They chased through the corridors, panting, whipped by the horror; Federspiel tore a half-loose torch out of its ring, swung it, let it blaze anew. The waterfall glowed with fiery sparks, the trees rustled in the chamois garden. Running feet were behind them, breathless shouting. On the wall of the Tomb chamber the stone images listened rigidly. And behind the three of them, with a booming crash, the rock door slammed shut, a heartbeat too late....

That was the rescue. In ghostly flight everything slipped by. They stumbled, fell, got up again and ran along the rushing water of the stream. Fresh air blew on them, stars glittered. The gorge.

"Go on! Keep going!" the hunter shouted. "If they find us, they'll tear us to pieces."

"They are right to do so," came a groan from Peter's dry throat.

Anderl screamed and cried, calling sacred names.

The torch glowed dimly. Nevertheless, they found the way through the walls, hurried, sick with terror, up the steep spiral corridors.

At the top they fell down as if felled. In a cruel shortness of breath, Federspiel tore at his shirt collar. Bloody foam stood before his mouth.

"I'm dying..."

Peter struggled with him, straightening him up.

"Where's the boy? Anderl?"

The hunter's breath whistled.

Peter looked around. The lad was gone.

"Anderl!" he shouted. "Anderl!"

No one answered. In the depths, the brook roared.

"Holy God! This is a misfortune..." stammered Federspiel, half straightening up and trying to call out the name in a weak voice:

“Anderl!”

His head fell heavy on his side.

In agony, Peter waited until he recovered a little. How, if those from the Mithra cave now came and found them here?

“He’s running down to the priest,” groaned the exhausted man. “And it’s our fault...”

Peter wanted to shout, but the sick man stopped him.

“It’s no longer possible...” he said quietly. “The others might hear us.... It’s no use any more either...”

“What... what did the old man say?” cried Peter, breaking out. “He spoke Roma..., didn’t he? Didn’t he speak Roma? You must have understood!”

Federspiel nodded.

“I understood it... everything...”

And then he continued in an extinguished voice:

“It’s getting dark... night is coming.... Cold breaks in... God is dying!’... “So said the old man.”

“When the purity of the sun runner is stained, God dies.”

“It’s no use. We must go on!”

With difficulty, the heavy-breathing man stood up. “We must warn them...”

“Warn?” asked Peter.

“Go down.”

The hunter pulled himself together.

“Wait for the blacksmith.... For the girl. Save the girl! I’m going to the charcoal yard; have to dare, want to look for Rangger Blasi.... Tomorrow the peasants will come up, the Father will lead them, I know it...”

And as Peter stood indecisively, he added grimly, “I won’t stand by while they put little Sylvana down like cattle...”

Only then did Peter realize the danger that threatened Julia.

“I’m going,” he said. “I’ll be waiting for her...”

With a silent handshake, a desperate vow without words, they parted. Peter ran down the steep slope. Fear crushed his heart. Had she reached the blacksmith’s house by other means, before him?

He came to the empty village alley, reached the house. The windows were dark, the gate was firmly closed. He lifted a stone, threw it against the

windows of her chamber, and the glass shattered, everything remained silent.

Turning away from the house, he noticed a dark figure in front of the Rose Inn. A growl warned him.

“Who is it?” he called to her. In the bright night, he saw that he was looking at a woman. A woman with a dog standing next to her with bared white teeth. He backed away.

“You...?” he groaned out.

“Yes, me,” Notburga said. “I have been sent word that my brother is dead, and so I must look after mine.”

“And... And the child?” he said. His heartbeat faltered.

“The child, it has not wanted to stay in my sinful womb,” she said in a dark voice. “There is nothing between us now, Herr Storck!”

“I have done you a grave wrong...”

“No amount of crying will help,” she said quietly. “And our Lord God has forgiven me.”

“Do you want to stay here again?” he asked.

“Only for a while. Then comes Zöggeli Dursel, to whom I am betrothed. He has forgiven me for what has happened, and so I will be a good wife to him.”

“And this is old Spirit...?” asked Peter, holding out his hand coaxingly.

But the dog backed away from him with a suspicious growl.

“He doesn’t like me anymore...” said Peter sadly. “I suppose you don’t either anymore, Notburga?”

“I am of another,” she said, holding out her hand to him. “And now, God forbid! It is not fitting that we should stand together!”

“Farewell!”

She went to the inn. The door creaked. But once again she came back, took his head in both hands and kissed him on the mouth. Her cheek was wet.

Then the heavy gate fell into the lock. He watched her go until sudden terror fell upon him. Julia! There he stood, staring into the past. And perhaps tomorrow already would come frenzied, murderous....

He walked a little way up the path that Julia must come down.

Cicadas shrilled around him, a star passed in a golden arc across the round of the sky, as it did then. How beautiful was this night, and how it

was filled with horror and fear! His feet were heavy with lead, his head ached, his eyes burned. Indifferently the blank moon looked down from the army of stars.

Oh, only finally away from here! Away from this valley of terror. But not without her, no, not without her.

There was the sound of footsteps. Peter jumped up. Something shiny flashed before his eyes.

“Dog!” rasped a deep voice.

The thrust missed. In a flash Peter had leapt aside, grabbing with all his might the hairy paw that held the knife.

“I want to save you, man!” he shouted. “Julia, you above all. So listen!”

The blacksmith broke free in one swift movement. Only now did Peter see how devastated the man’s bearded face was. With her head bowed Julia stood beside him. In a great hurry Peter reported what had happened. How he and Federspiel overheard the service, how the boy who was following them had run away. He told the blacksmith, who listened to him with a grim face, that Federspiel was on his way to the charcoal yard to inform Rangger Blasi. They should save themselves for God’s sake, because tomorrow the worst was to be expected.

“It’s all the same now,” spoke Fentor dully. “It is all over!”

“So do what you will,” cried Peter in despair. “But you, Julia, you stay with me...”

She did not answer, standing white and still in the moonlight.

Confused, Peter looked at the blacksmith.

“You hate me...” he said. “It happened only because I believed that the Fire spirits had murdered my uncle.”

“And now? Since you yourself saw him die, in the midst of those you call Fire spirits? What do you believe now?”

“So the old man was...?” Peter staggered, grabbed his forehead, and looked at Julia. The girl nodded silently.

“O Julia, why didn’t you trust me!” he cried out. “Why, why not, Julia?”

The blacksmith laughed harshly. “There was a way recorded in an old book for you alone, Herr Peter Storck. You, however, were one who could not keep the word, and have spoken of it to others. Thus you did not come to us and brought misfortune on those who serve the light. I can never be

your friend. The lady may do as she pleases. If she wants to go with me and the brothers to Engadin, she must immediately go back the way we came. If she wants to remain in your protection, it is all the same to me. The sacred fire is extinguished and needs no one to guard it. So she who has lost it from her hands may be among men like other women.”

He pushed Peter aside and strode toward his house.

“Julia!” cried the young man once more. As she stood like a stone image in the bright glow of the moonlight and made no answer, he was seized with the courage of despair. He seized her arm and drew her away with him toward the Zeitlanghof.

“You stay with me, Julia!” he groaned. “Stay till what is sure to come is over. And tomorrow, when it is dark, you shall go away with me, away from this dreadful region.”

She gave a single sob.

“Father!”

He felt that her soul was sore, that it needed to rest after the shuddering in the Mithra grotto. He felt weakly that she confided in him. Just don’t talk now, don’t ask.

In him everything was as if dead and died, beyond a certain measure even sensation was extinguished. Shadows, pale and unreal, slid through his mind. Notburga... the dog... Dreams! All this was surely only a formation of the night, a shadow that had to fade away in the first red of the sun.

Julia was beside him, hanging heavily on his arm. Her foot bumped against stones, she stumbled with closed eyes. Then he took her in his arms and carried her through the overgrown autumnal garden, carried her past Death, who silently guarded the gate.

The stairs groaned under the double burden. He let the motionless one slide into the pillows. The four-poster bed creaked softly. Quietly went her breath, only sometimes she sobbed softly in her sleep, as children do.

He locked all the doors, put the loaded gun on the table, ready to fire, and went back out into the moonlight. The stars were sinking.

The blacksmith came back from his house, approached the waiting man, and threw a pack on the ground.

“Clothes,” he said, and his voice was like distant thunder. “Clothes and things belonging to the Fräulein.”

Peter took the bundle and involuntarily reached for the sack on the man’s shoulder.

“This one is mine!” Fentor gruffly pushed Peter’s hand away.

“Unclean feet will not soil the place where the Father sleeps.”

He laughed bitterly.

“What do you have in it?” asked Peter, uncannily touched.

“That will be seen in its own time. And now don’t stop me, Monsieur! Every word you say is to me like one reaching into the raw flesh of a wound. And if I knew that it was you for whom the sacred bowl is broken...”

He clenched his fists and his eyes glowed.

“She, the daughter of the sun, may she give thanks that I do not break you like rotten wood. She has asked for you...”

His terrible fists trembled; a groan came from his throat. But then his anger dissolved.

“That, too, is now the same. All is equal.”

A sudden, thrusting cry came over him. With shaking shoulders he passed Peter, trudging heavily up the path.

“His God is dead,” Peter thought, looking after him. “Is dead...”

He took the pack, carried it into the house, quietly unlocked the door and placed it in the sleeping woman’s room. Then the restlessness drove him out again.

For a long, long time he had to wait until Federspiel came.

“I found Blasi,” said the hunter. “At first he tried to kill me, but I fought him off, resisted him. Then I was able to talk. Now he’s out of his mind, crying and laughing all over the place!”

He sat down next to Peter on the side of the road.

“That’s how we finished our plan.

And now that it is too late, I know that all my life, without knowing it; I have belonged to the fire spirits. I also worshipped the sun every day... Verily, it was a priest whom we saw die...”

“So I also found my uncle and saw him... for the first and last time,” Peter replied. “It was not a blessing on either of us, Herr Federspiel...”

“What can be made good, we have made good; and as I have preserved the poor little thing from the fools who in a few hours will be raging like the wild bulls, I suppose you haven’t slept in the meantime either?”

“She’s with me...” said Peter. “And tomorrow, when dawn comes, I’m going away from here.... forever. And you, Herr Federspiel, will come with me. My house in Vienna has room enough.”



The hunter gave a forced laugh.

“Me? In Vienna? You don’t believe that yourself, Herr Storck. I am also destined for another. I know it. Thank you. You are a good man. No, no, don’t talk to me. I will stay where I am. I know well what will come, and in comparison, the peasant storm against the sun people will be child’s play and will soon be over. They won’t find anyone in the stone caves, and they can’t harm the dead.

And now, Herr Storck, let’s try and rest for another hour. The moon has already set, and soon the god they believe has died will come up. He dies every year, becomes paler and paler, and at the turn of winter, after all, he walks through the forest again, girded with gold.”

He stood up, squeezed Peter’s hand, and walked toward his hut. Timid birdcalls rose up. A slender rosy streak rose in the east.

“There’s still time...” murmured Peter. His eyes fell closed. Quietly he crept through the garden, taking off his shoes in the hallway so as not to wake his beloved.

In his uncle’s chair, with his face against the brightening window, he looked with aching eyes into the rising day. Scornfully the mountain giants looked into the room.

What was it that sat there at the window looking up at them, pondering its childish riddles, asking questions that no one could answer? The Hockauf seemed to shrug his woody shoulders at the creature that seemed so important. Hundreds and thousands of the creatures that lived in the folds of the mountain died daily, chasing each other, killing each other without mercy, writhing in the last need. The snail ate the green leaf, the frog the snail, the hedgehog the frog, the fox the hedgehog. The robin caught the worm with a delicate murderer’s beak, while the marten went after the bird’s brood. The sparrow hawk hit the pigeon, and a thundering shot took him from the branch on which he was sitting. A roebuck fell in the thicket wounded by the willow, the night frost strangled flower children, and a rock fall smashed into the chamois herd. Two hundred year old firs were bent by the foehn wind; the rock from primeval times was broken into pieces by water that froze in its crevices. Everything was exposed to the change, none had continuance, value or importance, one thing was like the other, nothing and everything. The Schellbock only had to shake a little bit, just a little bit, to turn this yard with the painted death, with bedsteads, books, pictures,

with people and equipment into a tangled pile of rubble, on which grass and dandelions and other hardy plants could already grow the next spring.

## SECTION TWENTY-FIVE

A wild roar, a screaming voice made the quietly slumbering man cringe.

Quickly he locked all the doors and went down to the village. They were there. They had come up from the valley, as the hunter had predicted, and the Sankt Mareiner mingled excitedly with the armed mob.

A red beard trembled, fists stretched from the brown sleeves of the Capuchin habit.

“Now we know,” cried Father Archangelus, and his mighty voice called out like a trombone.

“Apparently it is now why the sweetest Heart of Jesus has been weeping bloody spikes in the parish church down below, as anyone can see. Now we understand God’s wrath, who has withdrawn his hand from the land of Tyrol and gives it to the enemies for terrible punishment. In vain we priests wept and prayed before the most reverend property; in vain did we fervently implore the patron saint of the land, St. Joseph. Yes, what is the matter with us?

What then is the matter with the Christian Catholic country?”

He lowered his arms and directed a fearful look at the crowd.

“Our Christianity is desecrated, our Lord and Savior insulted, with bitter tears the most blessed Virgin Mary has turned away from us. Abominations have occurred in these mountains, pagan, hellish abominations, satanic filth. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is mocked by a pagan priest, naked harlots dance before idols, people in Beelzebubian guise walk around. Three Christian men have watched the Satanic Mass in a cave, shuddering. Andreas Kinigadner!” he shouted loudly.

“Step forward and bear witness!”

Then Anderl detached himself from the crowd and went trembling to him. His clothes were torn, his hands bruised by thorns. With an uncertain voice he told how he had seen the devils descend with Herr Storck and Serafin Federspiel and how they had followed them. And what they did with flute playing, shameless dances, colored lights, chalice and bread and songs....

In tremendous excitement the crowd listened.

“Now, speak Andreas!” commanded the Capuchin. “Who of this unhappy congregation was among the Idolaters?”

Slowly, timidly, the names fell:

“The blacksmith Fentor, his brother, the charcoal-burner, the pitch collector, the Demoiselle... the wanderer.... he was the chief among them...

“That’s why God threw him down!” the monk railed. “Let’s go, Christian people, and put an end to paganism. There’s been enough talk already...”

Insane rage flared up. In an instant, the circle was broken. A wild swarm rushed toward the forge.

“Father!”

Peter stepped quickly toward the zealot.

“You are causing a great misfortune. Those people up there haven’t harmed anyone...”

The red-bearded man looked at him with a wry look, smiling dangerously.

“Beware!” he hissed. “I warn you!”

Peter understood him well, aware of his impotence. One word from the man in the brown robe could put his life in danger. And then also Julia was lost.

The strong gate of the blacksmith’s house resisted for a long time, until they found an iron-bound lifting beam, under whose blows the oak wood burst. Howling the crowd poured into the abandoned homestead. Windows burst into shards, flying with their frames into the street, bedsprings dusted in white and brown clouds, dishes smashed against the walls, axes drove splintering into cupboards and chests. They did not find the blacksmith.

“Once again I ask you...,” Peter turned to the clergyman, indignant at the useless destruction.

“I know it well that you are a Josephine and a bad Christian,” the priest scolded, and his summer-stained face darkened. “I am not responsible for your soul, but I am responsible for the souls of these people. Again, don’t try to get in my way!”

A woman came out of the house with a cross, stroked the Savior and cried: “Good yes? You’ll have it good with me. You’ll get an eternal light. You have had your bitter suffering ten times in this cursed house...”

“Up against the druids and spirits! Towards the charcoal yard! Burn the witch!” they shouted.

The troop gathered.

“Andreas Kinigadner!” shouted the priest. “Lead us!” And with the boy as their guide, they charged up the mountain, the cross and the Father at their head.

Peter stayed behind. Someone chuckled beside him. It was old Frau Patscheider. “Ui, the fools!” Her withered mouth put itself into a thousand mocking wrinkles.

“The secret ones, who live in the mountain, want to slay them. And they have greater power than the God of the Cross, and I myself saw how the thunder threw the fiery hammer into the church down in the valley, so that it burst into bright fire. Because he was the stronger than the other... Probably the God on the cross will not be able to help the Tyrolean’s either...”

Murmuring and grumbling, she went on. Peter hurriedly went into his house, shooed Hirlanda, who was standing helplessly in front of the locked parlor doors, and entered.

“Julia!” he called softly. “Are you awake?”

He opened the door to the bedroom. She met him in one of the dresses the blacksmith had brought in with foresight of what had now happened in his house. Deep shadows lay under her eyes, her face was white.

Compassionately, moved by the most intimate love, he stroked her hair. Then, crying wildly, she threw her arms around him.

He did not torment her with questions, brought milk and bread, served her, carefully told her the most necessary things about the events of the morning.

“In the evening we leave this house,” he said. “And the country, Julia!”

“Where shall I go?” she lamented, “I have no one left...”

“Are you not my wife?”

She looked at him, trembling. A faint red ran down her beautiful face.

“I am yours!” Like a breath the confession came from her lips. And timidly at first, then as if seeking release from long restrained agony, she began to speak. That actress of the Vienna Carinthian Gate Theatre, who had left Vienna after the incident between Peter’s uncle and the French prince, had been her mother.

In a small village in the Engadine Valley, her home, she gave birth to Martin Storck's child in poverty and hardship. A letter, in which the frivolous creature asked the deceived lover for support after years, put him on the track. He sent a trusted man to her and made her an offer of a sufficient sum of money if she would give up the girl and leave her to him. Without hesitation, the actress, whose true name was Avorai, accepted the offer and handed over the child, who had been left to her own devices to grow up among the Roma-speaking youth of the village. She handed the child over to the man who brought her the money from the former cavalry officer.

Martin Storck had the pretty girl, to whom he immediately turned his whole heart, carefully educated in Innsbruck, and appeared once a year in the capital, to look after his daughter and took care of her well-being in every conceivable way.

At this reminder of the love of the now departed, Julia burst into silent, violent weeping, and it was a long time before Peter could dare to ask her any more questions.

"Poor child..." he comforted, tenderly stroking her hair. "How joyless your youth must have been!"

Then she started up, looking at him with a luminous gaze.

"Joyless? If you knew how happy my noble father's love made me! And how great the joy was when he allowed me to spend my summers in Sankt Marein, to be near him! He opened up the rich treasures of his knowledge to me, let my thirsty soul drink from the source of his wisdom, and wrapped my childlike heart in the mantle of his indescribable goodness."

"So you were here... In the Zeitlanghof?" asked Peter in amazement.

She shook her head softly.

"No. He did not permit it. Only the blacksmith, whom he trusted completely, knew that I was his daughter, and with him I had to live. The others in the village had no idea of our true relationship."

"Strange..." said Peter. "You, who held one of the highest and most sacred positions in the Mithra group..."

She covered her eyes with her hand. Gently Peter pulled her arm.

"Be my brave girl and speak on!" he begged.

Her face became gloomy.

"There came the change..." she spoke to herself.

“What change...” he inquired, eager to solve the mystery that still surrounded her.

“I knew nothing of these things when I was in Sankt Marein the first summer,” she continued. “It wasn’t until my second year that I noticed that my father was quieter and more serious than usual and often looked at me with meaningful glances. Also, to my great concern, he stayed for days in the mountains, accompanied by the blacksmith and old Blasi and when he returned, he sometimes made strange speeches that filled me with fear, calling himself Aemilianus, talking about how he had already lived here two thousand years ago and that he had served the immaculate God. And once there was a harsh light in his otherwise good eyes that made me fearful. And it was to me as if another looked out of him, a ruthless and evil one. On such days he began to speak Roma, which I well understood from my childhood. I was also able to speak this language with Fentor, the charcoal burner and Rangger. They understood it. The two of them were who persuaded my father to revive the old faith, which had never been completely extinguished and whose festivals they celebrated every year. And they were certain that father was a resurrected priest of Mithra, that same *Aemilianus Sagitpitchius* whose stone image was to be seen in the burial chamber.

And one day it overcame my father. He sat with me in the forest; we had looked for berries and mushrooms. Then his eyes suddenly became fixed and large and to my horror his lips said:

‘The one in me wants it! The one in me forces me!’

“And then he fell fainting into the moss. I screamed and cried, and then the old pitch-collector came and brought him to again.”

She shuddered together under this memory and wrung her hands.

“And then you, too, went to the night services for your father’s sake?” asked Peter.

“Yes,” she replied. “The old Mithra faith flared up with power when it was said that a ‘Father’ had been resurrected. That’s what the faithful call the priest who transforms the bread and the holy wine and alone may kindle the fire of the sun. Already in former times small crowds of pious people had gone the secret ways during the equinox, partly disguised as devils, in order to frighten the curious. The people called the light bearers fire spirits. Now however, in a short time, it became hundreds, who served the sun. Only the sun virgin was missing. Then my father took me, told me to put on

a white robe and led me into the grotto. There they kissed the hem of my robe, and from then on I was surrounded by love and reverence, and carried the bowl with the sacred fire to the Father on the days of the great celebration.”

“And of me, of me, I suppose he never spoke, your Father?” interjected Peter, quiet pain in his heart.

She smiled a little. “He always spoke of you,” she said, looking at him. “Only when the strange being came over him, when the ‘other’ was in him, then, your name only sometimes passed his lips.”

‘The way is written for him in the book,’ he once said to me and Fentor.

Fentor did not like this, but he was accustomed to submit. Then, however, things got worse with my father. Only rarely was he free from the Imagination of being that Roman tribune. It might have frightened him himself. Why else would he have secretly deposited a clue for you in his desk? He suspected that his mind would become more and more darkened and confused. And one day he did not return. He had gone to the mountains and did not come back. I waited in mortal fear. It was only in the evening that Fentor and Blasi appeared to me and solemnly announced that father had been united with the god and had to stay near the holy places. There, in the hut of Blasi, I could see him. I climbed up, found him and realized with horror, that the madness had completely taken possession of him. But long before, he took a sacred oath from me that if you ever came to Sankt Marein, I would never tell you anything about him. If God so willed, you would find your way to him.”

“And yet he met me twice...” Peter exclaimed.

“It was a dull longing that drove him. He loved you so much, and often spoke of you being the only one of his blood and name, even as a child. In the cradle devoted to him. But then, when you were near him, he fell to the violence of the other soul that was in him...”

“Oh, if only you had trusted me, Julia!” lamented Peter.

She bowed her head. “I could not. The oath bound me. Almost daily the blacksmith reminded me of my vow. He hated you, Peter; he suspected that you would not rest until my father was found. It was he who put the warning on your window. He and Blasi spread the rumor that my father had been killed in the mountains. Nobody cared about the apparent stranger who lived in the hut of the pitch collector. And even when they saw him, whom everyone called the wanderer, they would not have seen the kind,



handsome Herr Martin Storck with his long white beard and friendly eyes in the changed man's evil face."

"How strange! Strange!" murmured Peter.

"And once...," her voice seemed to falter. "Once the pain in his chest, from which he had suffered before, overcame my father. That's when I asked Sylvana to fetch the pills that had always helped and that were in the library, as I well knew. She didn't dare, because she was afraid of your dog.

So I entered. You were asleep. The moon was shining on your face. You smiled so sweetly... There..."

She fell silent in tender shame.

"There you kissed me..." he pressed his lips to her mouth.

But immediately he said hastily, "Your faith was pure. How did it happen that the little strumpet, Sylvana, was allowed to enter the sanctuary?"

Julia looked to the ground.

"Many were against her..." she said softly. "But father forgave her.

He often rejoiced in her childlike cheerfulness. And what father said was law, even if some did not like it. No one would have dared to rebel. Thus, she was included in the lowest level, among the ravens.

Ah... and now..."

Again the silent crying of a deep pain came over her.

Motionless, Peter sat next to his beloved, holding her slender hand in his, waiting patiently.

"So all mysteries are solved," he said after a while.

"And I have but one wish, beloved Julia, that we might escape from this gloomy and sad region to friendlier lands."

She did not answer, nestling close to him.

"I'll go with you..." she whispered, "I loved you when I first saw you, I love you, I will always love you..."

A tremendous dull crash startled them both. Rolling, one mountain threw the booming thunder to the other, hurling it back again like a giant ball. The windows of Zeitlanghof rattled as if under a terrible gust of wind.

Startled, they looked toward the mountains. Two grayish-yellow dust clouds were rising, spreading out. One came out from behind the summit of the Schellbock, and the second one wriggled out of the gorge like a distempered dragon.

"Fentor..." Julia cried out. "He's blown up the grotto..."

In the afternoon the peasants returned, disappointed, tired and weary. With them the Capuchin priest.

They had not succeeded in entering the sites dedicated to the service of the Sun God. The terrible blast of an explosion knocked down the entrance and buried the tunnel, making it impossible to enter. Earthy brown water gurgled and roared between the piled up blocks of the vault down the gorge. Never again could a living man walk those paths that the fire spirits had walked.

‘In other respects, too, the procession had been in vain. The pitch hut stood empty with open doors. The few paltry household goods did not entice anyone to take the trouble of destroying it.

The charcoal yard was also deserted, and in its midst, made of bark and red tree lichen, stood a mocking figure with a cowl and a foxy goat’s beard, so recognizable that a young lad who had been walking along cried out loud:

“Father Archangelus”.

By evening, the group had already dispersed, and nothing remained but the devastated house of the blacksmith, around which the wind whirled the chicken feathers of the cut beds. The place lay still and dead, the people kept in their houses in consternation, unhappy and in fear, and the strange speeches of old Frau Patscheider frightened them even more. No one could know how great was the power of the god whom they had so grievously offended....

Only at the churchyard wall, there stood a darkly dressed golden-haired girl, to whom a black dog nestled fearfully, and watched the grave digger who shoveled earth into Christian’s unconsecrated grave. Now and then she brought a little cloth to her eyes, and then the dog gave a short, plaintive whine....

A black woodpecker was pecking at a tree next to the charnel house, making a rapid whirl on the trunk; this gave a sound like a muffled drumbeat.

And later, in the bright night, down in the valley, away from all the houses on the road, a carriage stopped. Two got in, a third stopped at the beat.

“Once again, Herr Federspiel! Come with us to Vienna...” said Peter Storck.

“It can’t be,” replied the hunter. “I must stay. A while longer, then it’s over. Farewell and be quite happy, you and your beautiful bride!”

“Farewell! A thousand farewells!”

The wind blew the word away, playing a little in the man’s hair, who still held his hat in his hand and looked after the carriage.

The rolling grew fainter, died away, for a while still the lighter sound of the trotting horse’s hooves sounded through the night. Then it was silent around Federspiel.

“Now I’m alone again, as before,” he said to himself, gritting his teeth.

“The good time is over.”

Slowly, coughing, he climbed up the way to Sankt Marein.

## SECTION TWENTY-SIX

The wedding was on the second of November in 1809. It was an unfriendly day full of fog and gloom.

But in “zum Alten Blumenstöckel” the many-armed silver chandeliers stood on the white-covered table. Golden candles burned, glasses sparkled, and from the bouquet of white roses that Julia held in her hand, wide silk bows hung down, apple-green and peach-red.

Bartenstein, a Franconian, had come from Würzburg, and Peter’s friends had arrived.

As the couple entered, the bride and groom were greeted by the delicate tinkling of a spinet and a well-sung chorus of voices:

Let the fiery bombs resound  
Piff, puff, puff, vivallerallera!  
Our brother shall live and the whole Storck house,  
His dearest wife at his side,  
So drink this little glass to him now!  
Empty the glasses, pour them again,  
Let’s all be true brothers!

A bright drop glistened on the bride’s cheek.

“Weep not, dearest heart!” whispered Peter in her little ear. “He for whom we mourn looks down in blessing on our union...”

A little girl in light blue silk, blond as flax, curtsied neatly and held out two green goblets on a silver plate to the bride and groom, in which the noblest Rhine wine shone.

Peter stretched out his hand, winced.

“Hark!” he said. “There’s been a shot!”

Laughing and cheering, they crowded around him.

“He is still fighting at Pontlatz Bridge,” said Bartenstein. “Herr Brother, do not hesitate!”

The glasses sounded against each other thin and fine, like distant bell-ringing.

At the same hour, however, General Rechberg rode at the head of a strong column toward the upper reaches of the Inn Valley. At his side a very young captain of the French Chasseurs on horseback danced his white horse and looked up to the slopes that rose beside the road on the river.

Behind the two horsemen, between the bayonets of four men, walked the leader. It was an old peasant, in dirty red jacket, long and gaunt, repulsive to look at. His nose was missing; his thin lips pulled away from his teeth in a grin, deep piercing eyes lay in their sockets.

A stray dog, running with the soldiers, also came to him, sniffed at the scrawny legs of the signpost, suddenly howled and ran off with tail retracted, running away, on and on....

“Pardon, my general!” said the captain to Rechberg. “Is this the place where Colonel Burscheid suffered so ignominious a defeat at the hands of the cowardly rebels?”

Scornfully, the Bavarian general measured the chatterer.

“Perhaps your judgment would change, Herr Captain, if you had to deal with the riflemen of this country. For now, let us rather hope that we Bavarians finally succeed in winning the confidence of these good people.”

“Bavarians?” laughed the Frenchman, pursing his lips derisively.

“It is doubtful whether we should let a country which our Dalmatian and Italian regiments are about to occupy, go to the Bavarians. The Emperor will determine what is to be done with these goat-herders.”

The general bit his lips and bowed his head.

“What shame!” he thought. “Must I tolerate such insolent arrogance?”

A fierce answer hovered on his lips. Then, at the bend in the road, not far from the fateful bridge, a man stepped out from behind the leafless bushes and stopped in the middle of the road.

Involuntarily, the two officers tightened their reins.

This person looked strange. In the sunken face, whose skin stretched over the cheekbones, two fever eyes flickered like blue fires. The baggy clothes were neglected and torn, a bullet pouch hung on a faded ribbon over his shoulder, disheveled gamecock feathers fluttered on the yellow-green hat.

Defiant and wide-legged, he stood facing the marching troops, a strange smile erring in his pale features.

The general stopped his horse, bristled.

“What is that?” asked the Frenchman, pointing his gold-buttoned riding crop at the human.

“A rebel, showing himself in your honor,” the colonel gave darkly in reply.

The captain laughed brightly, hammered the spurs into the horse’s flanks so that it rose and shot forward, and then rode at a short trot toward the man, casually brandishing the swinging whip. Haughty face, looking down from half-closed eyes, he jerked the horse to a stop a few steps in front of the Tyrolean, let out a whistle and said briefly and harshly:

*“Rends toi, Canaille! - Surrender, scumbag!”*

Then the skinny one gave a laughing scream, brought the rifle up and a yellow muzzle flash flashed in blue smoke.... The Frenchman gave a mewling sound like a sick cat and fell heavily from his horse... with his face in the dung of the misty road.

The general urged his horse aside, shouted.... But without command, pattering fire burst from ten, twenty guns.... Silently the attacker collapsed, his blood steamed in the fresh air.

It was only a single, sick, poor man, a former student named Serafin Federspiel, who died there.

## About Joe Bandel

Joe Bandel lives in North Central Minnesota with his dog Valentine. He enjoys nature, hiking, spiritual and metaphysical studies, shamanism, druidry and translating German dark fantasy and horror stories into English.

His translation projects include stories by:

Hanns Heinz Ewers

Karl Hans Strobl

Stanislaw Przybyszewski

A book of poems by Mia Holm

Perhaps the biggest project is the translation of the world's first illustrated fantasy magazine first published in 1919 in the German language, **Der Orchideengarten**. This includes the first English translations of these stories by various authors along with the original artwork. This project is ongoing.

His work includes limited editions by Side Real Press of England to include **The Hanns Heinz Ewers Brevier**; **Alraune**; and the to be published **Vampire**. It also includes the Side Real Press collector edition of **Kokain** magazine.

