

The Rebirth of Melchior Dronite



Paul Busson

The Rebirth of Melchior Dronte

(The Immortality of the Soul)

By Paul Busson

The Rebirth of Melchior Dronte

Originally published in 1921 in the German Language

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About the Author

Paul Busson (born July 9, 1873 in Innsbruck; died July 5, 1924 in Vienna. His parents were Emma Busson and Dr. Arnold Busson, a university professor and historian. He was the oldest of ten children and after graduation studied medicine in Graz before joining the Achter Hussars. He became an officer and was sent to Galicia as a lieutenant. Later he was a journalist and wrote for *Simplicissimus* magazine as well as being a war correspondent during World War I.

He worked as a playwright and wrote historical novels with fantastic and mystical elements. He was one of the most beloved writers in his day and I look forward to translating three more of his novels:

Peace on Earth – 1920

Sylvester -1927

Vitus Venloo - 1930

INTRODUCTION

So why did I decide to do a new translation of **The Rebirth of Melchior Dronte** more commonly known as **The Man Who Was Born Again** by Paul Busson? I remember reading this in electronic format in the existing English translation years ago and found it interesting, but I soon forgot about it. It was my new translation of **Fire on the Glacier** that really decided the matter for me because it was as if I had never read the book before and that was how translating this story has been for me!

I have rarely been so moved emotionally by a story as this one and I can only hope that my new translation does it justice. Still, I don't really need to worry because I could feel the energy pouring out as I wrote. This story was such a powerful influence on me that I felt I would write a special afterword describing how much it has meant to me.

This book is now the seventeenth 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, **The Rebirth of Melchior Dronte** 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.

Joe Bandel

The Rebirth of Melchior Dronte

The magician: "O Sheikh, I am going to the other world; procure for me a right in the hereafter!"

The Sheikh: "I can give you one piece of advice; If you follow it, it will be for your salvation."

Turkish legend

"When the angel of death touches your heart, the soul leaves its narrow house, faster than lightning. If it can take its memory along with it, it remains aware of its sins. This is the path to purity and that of the entrance to God."

Secret Doctrine of the Beklashi

What I am writing down here, hoping that it will fall into the right hands according to the will of God I, Sennon Vorauf, have experienced in that physical existence which preceded my present life. These memories have come to me by a special grace beyond that transformation which is called death.

Before I realized this, I suffered from them and thought they were inexplicable, agonizing kinds of dreams. Besides, however, I also had to go through all kinds of shocks of an unusual kind. It happened, for example, that the striking of an old clock, the sight of a landscape, a fragrance, the melodies of a song, or even a mere association of words would assail me most violently with the thought, that I would have quite certainly already once heard, seen, breathed in, or somehow experienced it before. I was in this or that place, which I saw in my present life for the first time, and already had once been there. Yes, often enough, in conversation with new acquaintances, I was struck by the idea that I had already been in very

special relations with them. Since it was impossible for me to understand before the onset of this realization, it was also impossible for me to provide explanations for the indescribably exciting movements of my mind and emotions, much to the grief of my parents, which often led into hours of brooding, the unknown cause of which disturbed them not a little. But through frequent repetition and the ever sharper imagery of the story I became aware, even as a boy, that they were nothing more than reflections of fates which my soul had suffered in another body, namely before the birth of my present body; moreover, these "Dreams" represented experiences that were completely alien to my current circle of experiences and frighteningly distant from my present circle of thoughts. I had never heard of such things or even read about them somewhere or otherwise experienced them. I began to record these "dreams" of my own accord and thereby achieved that from then on in certain favorable moments I had the so-called wakefulness to remember such memories with extraordinary accuracy.

More and more clearly and coherently from these "lucid dreams" (as I called them in my case) the overall picture of a life emerged that I had lived before this under the name of a German nobleman (I will call him here Baron Melchior von Dronte), had lived and ended, when his body fell to the transformation of death and then became free to be my soul as Sennon Vorauf.

In the peaceful and blessed life filled with inner peace, which I lead, the retrospective view of the wild and adventurous existence of Melchior of Dronte broke through in a disturbing, confusing and frightening way. What he was guilty of was my guilt and if he atoned, he atoned for the soul that came back, for his and therefore my soul.

I am fully aware that many people will read this book with incredulous smiles, and perhaps in some places at times with disgust and revulsion. But at the same time I hope that the number of people of deeper feeling will be large enough not to let this writing perish. To those who are able to remember details from previous forms of existence, who are conscious of a previous life, I would like to dedicate this book to them; I would like to make this book their own.

Just as I have replaced the real name I had with "Dronte", I have replaced those of various persons, whose descendants are still alive, with invented names. Moreover I touch here the fact that I have called people

"Dronte" in this life, whom I knew from the time before my death. Most of them were not at all aware of a previous existence. Nevertheless, there were moments and occasions with them, in which clearly recognizable flashes of memory flared up in them in a flash of recognition, without them having succeeded in determining the source of such disturbing feelings or having the ability to hold on to them. I am certainly not saying anything new to those who, like me, have brought parts of an earlier consciousness into the new life.

The raw, crude and often coarse nature of the following biography of a life, I could not in truth love, as unpleasant and hurtful some of it may seem. I was not to embellish and smooth out the terrible clarity with which the memories surfaced in me, and thus to write a pleasantly readable book. Everything had to remain the way it was as it formed from a time whose spirit was different from ours.

However, from the deepest, most personal feeling this book should speak to the immortality of the soul, and this confession is to possibly awaken this confession in others. Above all, I am inspired by the hope that those who believe in the wandering of the soul after the death of the body will not be given completely worthless indications in this book. Others who have not yet progressed on the path that I have walked, may still at least read it for the sake of its colorful content.

I remember very clearly an incident from my fifth year of life.

I had been undressed, as always, and lay in my pink lacquered, shell-shaped child's bed. The warm summer evening wind carried the chirping of many insects into the room, and the wax candle in a silver candelabra flickered. It stood on a low cabinet next to the glass lintel, under which the "Man from the East", or the "Ewli", as he was also called, was located.

This was a span-high, very beautifully formed figure, which a relative, who was in the service of a Venetian, had brought from there as a gift from the nobility.

It was the figure in wax of a Mohammedan monk or dervish, as an old servant often told me. The face had the sweetest expression for me. It was completely wrinkle-free, light brownish and with gentle features. Two beautiful dark eyes shone under a jet-black turban, and around the softly curved lips a small black beard could be seen. The body was in a brown-red robe with long sleeves, and around the neck the dervish wore a necklace of tiny amber beads. The two fine wax hands were on arms hanging down with the palms turned forward, equal-ready to receive and welcome anyone who should approach. This immensely delicate and artistically executed piece in wax and fabrics was highly valued in my family, and for that reason alone, it had been placed under a glass dome to protect it from dust and unskilled hands.

I often sat for hours in front of this expensive figurine for unknown reasons, and more than once I had the feeling as if the dark eyes were animated by being alone with me, as if there was a faint trace of a gentle, kind smile around its lips.

That evening I could not fall asleep. From the fountain in the courtyard came the sound of water splashing and the laughter of the maids washing and splashing each other and with similar shenanigans teasing each other. Also the cicadas and crickets in the meadows surrounding the mansion were making noise. Between all that sounded the muffled sounds of a French horn, on which one of the forest boys was practicing a call.

I climbed out of bed and walked around the room. But then I began to be afraid of the moment when old Margaret came into my room every night to put out the light in case I fell asleep with it on, and I went back to my bed. Just as I was about to climb over the edge of the bed shell with my bare legs, it was as if a voice softly called my name. I looked around

frightened. My eyes fell on the man from the Orient. I saw very clearly how he raised one arm under the glass bell and beckoned to me.

I began to cry with fright, looking steadfastly at the little figure.

Then I saw it very clearly for the second time: he waved his hand at me very hastily and commandingly.

Trembling with fear, I obeyed; in the process tears streamed unstopably down my face.

I would have loved to scream out loud. But I didn't dare, for fear of frightening the little man, who was now very much alive and waving more and more fiercely, in anger, such as my father, whose short one-time wave was not only for me, but for all the inhabitants of the house, an order that had to be obeyed.

So I went, crying silently, towards the cabinet on which the waving dervish stood. I had almost reached him, despite my anxious hesitant steps, when something terrible happened. With a horrible roar and in a cloud of dust, debris and splinters, the ceiling of the room collapsed over my shell bed.

I fell to the floor and screamed. Something flew whizzing through the air and smashed the glass dome and the waving man made of wax into a thousand shards and pieces. A brick that had flown over me.

I screamed at the top of my lungs. But there was screaming all over the house, outside at the well and everywhere, and the dogs in the kennel howled.

Arms grabbed me, pulled me up from the earth. Blood was running into my eyes, and I felt a cloth being pressed against my forehead. I heard the scolding, agitated voice of my father, the wailing of old Margaret and the moaning of a servant. My father hit him with a with a stick and shouted:

"You donkey, why didn't you report that there were cracks in the ceiling? I'll beat you crooked and lame...!"

Then I screamed so loudly that my father let go of him.

"The toad can't stand it, if I chastise the scoundrel," he said angrily, he will never be a right fellow in his day!"

Spurs clanking he went out. I was more afraid of this clink than of anything else.

Then they gave me sweets and stroked me.

A young maid kissed my bare calves.

"Sweet boy!" she said.

In a mirror they showed me how a piece of glass had hit me on the root of my nose and tore a small cut between my eyebrows.

A scar remained from it.

I was playing in the garden with my little cousin Aglaja, whom I loved very much. I had woven a wreath from black, shiny ball berries, which I placed in her copper-colored hair, which shone golden in the sun. She was the king's daughter, enchanted in thorny hedges, and I set out to save her. The dragon that guarded her had to be played by black Diana. With clever eyes the dog waited for the new game.

Then, accompanied by a maid, the barber came hurriedly through the garden with a brass basin, and a servant appeared at the door of the house, it was Stephan, who shouted at him to hurry.

Aglaja threw her wreath of berries to the ground, and the two of us both of us ran behind her to grandfather's room, which we were usually only allowed to enter with his special permission. Such visits were always very solemn and only took place on the big holidays of the year or on birthdays, when we had to recite little poems and were given sweets in return.

It seemed to both of us a great dare, to go uninvited into the room of the stern old man, but curiosity drove us forward.

Grandfather was sitting quietly in his sleeping chair. He wore, as always, a gray-silk sleeve vest with embroidered bouquets of roses, black pants, white stockings and shoes with wide silver buckles. On his watch chain hung a bundle of golden, colored and glittering things, cut things, cut gemstones, corals and seals, which I had sometimes been allowed to play with.

In front of him stood my father with bowed head and he did not notice us children at all. When the gaunt barber, dressed in a patched jacket stepped closer, he grabbed him by the arm, his face turned red and he said half aloud:

"Next time run faster, damned Kujon, when you do him the honor!"

The miserable barber stammered a little, and with his hands flying grabbed his red bandages and switchblade, and pushed grandfather's sleeve up into the air, touched the eyelids of the upturned eyes with his finger, then felt around on the arm, while he held the basin under it. Thus he waited a while, and then he said shyly:

"It is of no use, free- glorious graces - the blood will never flow again!"

Then father turned around and stood with his face to the wall. Stephan gently pushed Aglaja and me out the door and whispered, "His Grace has gone to his fathers."

And when we looked at him questioningly, since we could not understand this, he said, "Your grandfather is dead."

We went back into the garden and listened to the noise that soon started in the house. To the right of the hallway was a spacious room in which, as a very small child I remembered seeing my mother being laid out between many candles. This chamber, in which otherwise all sorts of equipment stood, they now cleared out and dragged in large bales of black cloth, which smelled nasty.

Grandfather had preferred Aglaja to me, and had given her treats and candy more often than he had given to me. He had kept these good things in a turtle box, which smelled of cinnamon and nutmeg. She cried a little, Aglaja, because she was thinking that it would all be over now, when grandfather would go away. But then we both remembered the other box he had, which we were only allowed to look at very rarely. That was his golden snuff box, given to him by the Duke of Brunswick. But on this beautiful, sparkling box, on its lid, there was a second little lid and when this popped open, a very small bird appeared, flashing with green, red and violet stones, which bobbed with the wings and trilled like a nightingale. We could hardly get enough of seeing and hearing it, but grandfather slipped it into his pocket as soon as, after a short while, the lid closed by itself, and told us to be satisfied.

I said to Aglaja that now we could look closely at the bird and even feel it, since grandfather was dead. She was afraid to go up, but I took her by the hand and pulled her behind me.

No one was in the corridor, and the room was empty. Empty stood the wide armchair in which grandfather had spent his last nights. On the little table next to it were still the bottles with the long notes.

We knew that grandfather had always taken the can from the middle drawer. This drawer was made of colored wood decorated with ships, cities and warriors from the old times and on the drawer, which we tried to open, there were two fat Dutchmen who were smoking pipes and being served by

kneeling Moors. I pulled at the rings; but not until Aglaja helped me, did we manage to open the drawer.

There lay Grandfather's lace jabots and handkerchiefs, a roll of gold ducats, a large pistol inlaid with gold, and many letters in bundles, shoe buckles and razors, and also the box with the bird.

I took it out, and we tried to make the lid jump. But we did not succeed. But while we were working around, the big lid came off, and a thin plate detached itself from it, which concealed something. It was a small picture, which was painted in fine enamel colors. A picture which made us forget the little bird completely.

On a small sofa lay a lady with her skirts pushed up, and right next to her was a gentleman with sword and wig, whose clothes were also in strange disorder. They were doing something that seemed to us as strange as it was weird. In addition, the man was being attacked by a little spotted dog, and the lady lying down seemed to laugh. We also laughed. But then we argued very excitedly about what this was.

"They are married," said Aglaja, blushing.

"How do you know?" I asked, my heart pounding hard.

"I think they are gods..." whispered Aglaja.

"I saw a picture, where the gods were like that. But they didn't have any clothes on."

All of a sudden it was as if in the next room where our dead grandfather lay, the floorboard creaked. We shrunk back, and Aglaja cried out. Then I quickly threw the can into the drawer, pushed it closed and pulled my cousin out of the room. We slid into the garden.

"Aglaja..." I said, grabbing her hand. "Are we going to get married like that...?"

She looked at me, startled, tore herself away and ran back into the house. Confused and bewildered I went to Stephan, who was cutting roses from the stalks and gathering them in a basket.

"Yes, young Herr!" he said. "So it goes with all of us!"

Next to me sat Phöbus Merentheim and Thilo Sassen. We three were the most distinguished. Behind us squatted Klaus Jägerle, the whipping boy. He was allowed to study with us, was given food, and if we didn't know something, punishment was carried out on him. His mother was a washerwoman and his father wove baskets, although he only had one arm.

The other arm was cut by an enemy horseman, when he was protecting Thilo's severely wounded father with his body. In return Klaus was allowed to study with us and to come to the table at noon. Klaus was very industrious, shy and depressed, and had to put up with everything that his classmates cooked up when they were in an exuberant mood. He was almost worse off than the hunchback son of the grocer Isaaksohn, they had once put him at the door and spat in his face one after the other, so that the disgusting juice, mixed with his tears, ran down his new gentleman's sport coat.

I was in great fear because I had learned nothing. For before me stood the small, poisonous teacher of French in his inky, tobacco-colored jacket with the bent lead buttons, the goose quill behind his ear, talking through his Spaniol-filled nose. His pale face was full of freckles and twitched incessantly. In his left hand he held a book, and he waved the black-rimmed knotted index finger of his right hand in front of my face.

He always did it that way. All of a sudden, after he had studied our faces maliciously for a while, he would go after one of the students like a vulture and always found the most insecure out. It was his habit, to *vocabulaire* at the beginning of the lesson, that is to say, he threw a few French words in the victim's face, which had to be translated immediately.

This time he had chosen me.

"*Allons, monsieur-*," he hissed. "*Emouchoir-. Tonte- Mean. - At once! Quickly!*"

I was startled and stammered:

"*Emouchoir* - the fly tonguing, *tonte* - the Sheep shearing - *mean...* mean, that is - that is -"

He neighed with delight.

"Ah - you don't know, *Cher Baron?*"

"*Mean* -, that is --"

"*Assez! Sit down!*"

He bleated, and his little black eyes sparkled with amusement. Slowly he took a pinch from his round horn can, ran back and forth with two fingers under his pointed nose and then poked the can at my neighbor.

"Herr Sassen! - Not either? - Merentheim? Also not? - Jägerle, stand up and say it!"

Poor Klaus jumped up as if by a feather and said in a thin voice:

"*Mean* -, that's what they call the fifth container in the salt ponds into which the sea water flows for the extraction of the salt."

"Good," nodded the teacher, smiling mischievously. "He himself knows it, but as an appendage of the Noblesse in this school I call him *sot, paresseux et criminel!* Get him out of the seat, so that he gets what he deserves as the representative of the ignorant noblesse!"

I turned pale with rage. This excess of injustice against the poor boy, the only one who knew the rare and hardly used word, seemed to me outrageous. I nudged Sassen, but he only shrugged his shoulders, and Phoebus looked up in the air as if it were none of his business.

Hesitantly, Klaus Jägerle emerged from the bench. Thick tears stood in his eyes. Glowing red with shame, he fiddled with his waistband....

"Faster! Expose his derriere!" screeched the school fox and bobbed with the square ruler, "so that in place of nobility he gets his proper Schilling!"

Horrified, I saw Klaus drop his trousers. Two poor, skinny legs appeared beneath a gray, frayed shirt. The teacher grabbed him with a splayed claw.

That's when I jumped out of my bench.

"You're not going to hit Jägerle, *Monsieur!*" I shouted. "I won't permit it..."

"Ei, ei!" laughed the man, "this will immediately show you..."

He pressed down the willing head of the poor boy and struck a blow.

Then I jumped at the teacher's throat. He cried out with a gasp and kicked at me with his feet. We fell to the floor. The bench toppled over, and ink flowed over us. The other students whooped with joy and stomped their feet. I suddenly felt a sharp pain in my right hand. He had bitten me, with his ugly, black tooth stumps. I hit him in the face with my fist. Blood and saliva spurted from his mouth.

A hand grabbed me by the collar and pulled me up into the air. I looked into a coarse, good-natured face under a chubby gray wig.

The principal.

"Have you gone mad, *Domine?* - Rise, Herr!" he shouted at the bleeding teacher.

"He wants to kill me!" screeched the latter.

"Baron Dronte, you will leave the school immediately!"

The principal said, pointing to the door.

Klaus Jägerle still stood humbly with his head bowed and his thin, trembling legs, not daring to pull up his pants without permission.

It went badly for me when father kicked the groom with his foot and hit him, who was writhing and whimpering on the ground. In pity, I tore the whip out of my father's hand and flung it far away. Instead, I was now sitting in an attic of our house with water and bread. In the chamber was nothing but a pile of straw in the corner and a stool on which I could sit. Every day my father came, slapped me hard across the face and forced me to speak a Bible verse in a loud voice:

"For the wrath of man strives and spares not in the time of vengeance. And look to no person to make reconciliation, or to receive it, even if you want to give it."

When I had spoken the verse, I received a second slap in the face. I let it all wash over me and was full of hatred. Today was the fifth and last day of punishment.

Quietly a key turned in the door lock. I knew that it could not be my father.

It was Aglaja. My defiance against the world prevented me from giving in to the sweet joy that I felt at the sight of her. Lovely and blushing, she stepped in her white, blue-flowered dress over the threshold of the gloomy and dusty attic room. Her face was childlike and of indescribable charm. Her spotless skin shone milky white, lifted by the copper red of her hair. I knew well how dearly she loved me, and in my solitude and distress I too thought only of her, day and night. But there was enough evil in me to make me want to plunge her into suffering, too.

"What do you want here?" I growled. "Why don't you go to my Lord father - make yourself a dear child with him! You can just beat it, go away, you!"

Her eyelashes trembled, and her little mouth began to quiver.

"I just wanted to bring you my cake..." she said softly, holding out a large piece of cake to me.

I snatched it out of her hand, threw it on the ground and stepped on it with my foot.

"So!" I said. "Go and tell Frau Muhme, or my father, if you like!"

She stood quite motionless, and I saw how slowly two tears ran from her beautiful gray eyes. Then she went to the corner, sat down on the straw bed and wept bitterly.

I let her cry, while my own heart wanted to burst in my chest. But then I could not stand it any longer. I knelt down to her and stroked her hair.

"Dear, dear Aglaja..." I stammered, "forgive me - you are the only one here whom I love..."

Then she smiled through her tears, took my right hand in hers and brought it to her young breast. And I thought of how once at night, in a dark, fearful urge, I had crept into her room and, by the light of the night lamp, I had lifted her blankets to see her body just once. She had awakened and had looked at me fixedly until I had crept out of the room, seized by remorse and fear.

As if she had guessed what I was thinking about, she suddenly looked at me and whispered:

"You must never do that again, Melchior!"

I nodded silently, still holding one of her small breasts. My blood surged in pounding waves.

"I want to kiss you with pleasure -" she said then and held out her sweet, soft lips to me.

I kissed her clumsily and hotly, and my hands strayed.

"Don't - oh don't -" she stammered, and yet she nestled tightly in my arms.

Then somewhere in the house a door opened and slammed shut with a bang. Spurs clanked. We moved apart.

"Will you always love me, Aglaja?" I begged.

"Always," she said, looking me straight in the eyes.

And suddenly she began to cry again.

"Why are you crying?" I urged her.

"I don't know - maybe it's because of the cake -" she said, smiling to herself.

I picked up the trampled and soiled pastry from the floor and ate it.

"Maybe it's also because I won't be with you for long."

The words came out of her mouth like a breath. I looked at her in dismay. I did not understand her.

"Don't pay any attention to me," she laughed suddenly.

"Even if it's true, I'll always come back to you!"

She pressed a quick kiss on my mouth, smoothed her clothes and quickly ran out of the attic room.

"Aglaja! Stay with me!" I cried in sudden fear.

I was suddenly so afraid. But I heard only the hard clatter of her high heels on the stairs.

An autumn fly buzzed on the small, cobweb-covered window restlessly. In the sooty, torn nets hung decomposed beetles, empty butterflies, and insect corpses of all kinds. - The fly wriggled. The buzzing sound became high. Slowly, out of a dark hole crawled a hairy spider with long legs, grasped the fly, and lowered its poisonous jaws into its soft body. - The buzzing became very high - the death cry of a small creature. Suddenly I saw that the spider had a terrible face.

I ran to the door and banged on the wood with both fists.

"Aglaja!," I screamed. "Aglaja!"

No one heard me.

We had been working under the blue sky, in the warm, deep sunshine; we had been helping to harvest the fruit from the big field behind the house. The plums were dripping with sweetness. They tasted like wine. We could not get enough. The greengage that we touched were even more delicious. They melted in the mouth.

In the evening Aglaja cried out in pain.

At midnight she was dead.

The house was filled with cries of lamentation. Father locked himself in his study. The maids were wailing in their aprons.

Aglaja was dead.

I was just walking back and forth, picking up things without knowing what I had picked up; I leaned for a long time, without thinking about anything, with my head against a carved doorpost until the pain woke me up, drank water from a watering can.

The days, the days went by. Without beginning or end. Crying everywhere. I watched them clearing out the chamber in the corridor and bring out the black cloths. How they cut asters and autumn roses and made wreaths, sobbing and smearing their wet faces with their earthy hands. I stroked the handle of the chamber, a handle that had been worn thin from much use, and you hurt yourself on it if you were careless. But when they

were inside nailing the cloths to the walls and brought the candlesticks from out of the silver chamber, as the footsteps of people carrying something heavy, came down the stairs, I ran in the fallen leaves of the garden.

Mists were drifting and it was dripping. The beautiful time was gone. The last day was over. I saw a blue ground beetle and stepped on it. Yellowish intestines spilled out of its small body, the legs twitched, contracted silently and stiffly. So I did no differently than my father did when he beat people. I had to cry, all alone on a bench of cold stone. Once in the summer the stone had been so hot that Aglaja and I had tried to see who could keep their hand on it longer. Her white hand had been so delicate that she got a blister. - A cold drop fell from the sky onto my forehead.

I went back again. Dark yellow light fell out from the chamber; a coffin stood on black-covered trestles, on which was a cross of silver, and a high funeral crown, with flitters, colored glass and mirrors. The wax ran and dripped, the candles flickered. The flowers smelled of earth. Muhme knelt by the coffin.

"O my Aglajele! My Aglajele!" she cried. That her little face is never to be known! - Is it raining already?" she asked, turning her puffy eyes toward me.

"I don't know."

And then I cried out and cried so wildly that Muhme put her arms around my shoulders and spoke to me.

"You must not, boy, you must not - the people are coming!"

One could hear feet trampling. People were coming, murmuring. The finch in the hallway jumped from rung to rung in its cage and kept shouting:

"Look - look - look - the travel gear!"

I stood up.

The priest came. He had the sniffles and often pulled out his handkerchief. He had baptized Aglaja and blessed her.

Carriages drove up: the Sassens came, the Zochte, the Merentheim, the cuirassiers from the city, Doctor Zeidlow, the old Countess Trettin, the Hohentrapps.

A bell rang in the village, tolled; bing - bong - bing - bong. Schoolchildren.

Muhme waved to the teacher. I heard how she said, sobbing:

"He makes me sing the same song as he did with my blessed little Hans, even though she was already blessed. But she is in white innocence, as it were like a newborn child - God, oh God!"

Ursula Sassen and Gisbrechte Hohentrapp embraced her and led her. Then the servants picked up the coffin and carried it out into the rain.

It was not far to the cemetery. Crows were sitting in the weeping willows. Crooked old crosses leaned on both sides of the gravel-strewn path. The iron gate of the hereditary burial ground stood open with rust-red insides. Above it was a marble skull with two crossed bones. In its open yawning mouth birds had built a nest. It stood empty and abandoned. On top of the head grew moss like woolly hair. I saw everything.

They put the coffin on the ground, and the school sang again. As Muhme had wanted it, a song that is usually only sung for very young children. My cousin Hans was two years old when he died.

When little heirs to heaven
Die in their innocence,
So you don't forfeit them.
They are only there
Lifted up by the Father,
So that they may not be lost.

Then the priest blew his nose and spoke. The old man cried. The eighty-year-old Countess Trettin raised her lace shawl upwards.

"Dust to dust -," said the priest.

They carried the coffin down. The footsteps sounded hollow, there was a terrible echo. Voices came from the depths. Something fell with a thud down there in the darkness.

The rain rushed harder and harder. The carriages drove in puddles of water. The men tied red handkerchiefs over their hats, and the women put their skirts over their heads when they were outside.

My father looked sternly on all sides. The sexton brought him the key to the crypt.

"There - now have a drink!" said my father, and the sexton, wet and chattering with his teeth, bowed low. He made a face and ran his hand to his shoulder. He suffered from acute Rheumatism.

"Aglaja is freezing -" said a disconsolate voice inside me. "Aglaja-"

The big house was empty when I got home, the corridors silent. There was a whispering in the corners, and the clocks ticked. The stairs creaked in the night, and the wind cried in the chimney. It was a very strange house. So big and so empty.

On the dark corridor of the second floor was a Dutch clock with a polished face, on which the moon, sun and stars moved. Above it, the ornate hands went their way. The pendulum swung back and forth with a muffled, wham - wham. After every quarter of an hour, the striking work let its three-note sound be heard as if from far away:

Gling-glang-glong. At the end of each hour chimes announced their number. Then a door above the dial opened, and a small brown rooster slid out of it, moving its wooden wings with a groaning sound. His voice was lost. Always an invisible force took him back and closed the door again. At noon, however, an angel with a blue, gold-edged robe appeared instead of the cock and in three stiff jerks lifted a green palm branch.

At twelve o'clock at night, however, a dead little girl would appear in place of the angel. So we were told when Aglaja was still alive.

I was standing in this corridor one night. It smelled of apples and the strange wood of the wide linen cupboards on the wall. Deer heads carved from wood hung there. They held white turnips in their mouths and wore antlers that father and grandfather had captured. Certainly a hundred such deer heads were distributed throughout the entire house. One of the deer had been kept tame, held in a fenced area and then released. Later it had killed a fodder servant and the maids said that the blood of the servant still stuck to the antlers. The paint had peeled off the eyeballs of the wooden head, and so he looked down on me with a ghastly white and blind glare.

Old Margaret, shuffling through the corridors with her cane and enjoying the bread of mercy, had told me that at the midnight hour of the day the dead walked in the house where they had liked to be during their lifetime. I held in my hand a candelabrum with one of the wax candles that had burned at Aglaja's coffin a year ago, and waited for her to come.

The cupboards cracked, there was a throbbing in the wall, and then it was like a sigh. The wind went over the roof, so that the shingles rattled. When the hour strike was about to begin, the door above the clock face opened, and sure enough out came out a little dead man with hourglass and scythe, turned his skeleton once to the right and once to the left and raised the tiny scythe to strike.

"Wham - wham -," went the pendulum in the pauses of the hoarse chime of the bell.

"Aglaja" I called softly and peered down the corridor.

Then silently the door of the closet opened, I was standing nearby, and in the uncertain light of the candle I thought I saw an ancient woman with a wrinkled brown face and a large white hood. I staggered to the wall, but when I forced myself with all my courage to look once more I could not see anything but the closed door.

Then there was a cough and shuffling footsteps. Something gray and stooped. The candlestick rattled in my hand. But it was only old Margaret who was worried about me and came to see if I was really up there. I held on to her sleeve like a child and told her what I had encountered. She giggled and nodded.

"It was the old woman- The great-grandmother of Aglaja Starke, the daughter of the mayor, who had twisted the family tree - on the Krämer side. You have seen rightly, my Melchior, quite rightly. It's just that she came instead of the young one. She grabbed me by the jacket. I tore myself loose and stumbled down the stairs.

In the afternoon Heiner Fessl was executed. He had overheard the magistrate harass his wife, and since he noticed that his wife had given in to the powerful man, he had run from the workshop into the room and had shoved a red-hot iron that was lying in the fire, through the body of the magistrate, so that the strong man had to perish and die miserably. He had cruelly beaten him and likewise the woman. She was dying, people said. - Powerful helpers, who would have taken care of him- were not there, and so they broke the staff for him.

At dawn, the man of fear had gone out into the field and had announced it to the ravens, that the flesh of the sinner would be available before sunset. So the executioner's pigeons were sitting on all the roofs and waiting.

Father told me to put on the silk, lavender-grey coat and go with him.

"You're a wimp and a whiner, but you're no Dronte," he said. "I'm going to take you to the spa, boy!"

I felt sick with fear when I heard from a distance the muffled beat of the drum and the roar of the crowd. All the alleys were full. They had all travelled to see Fessl on the executioner's cart, and now he was to return. To

my comfort, we had to stop quite a distance from the scaffolding, because the crowd did not move and did not take into consideration the rank of my father.

"There you see how bold the scoundrels are when there are many of them together," said my father loudly and angrily. He was appeased, however, when the baker, who had his store there, hurriedly brought us two chairs, so that we could rest for the time being.

"What you see will be very wholesome for you," my father said after a while. "Justice does not work with rose water and sugar cookies. If it did, we noble folk could pound gravel on the roads and give our belongings to the rabble."

In the trees that stood in front of us and lined the square, many people were sitting. Just in front of us squatted an abominable fellow, dressed in the manner of Hessian cattle dealers, in the crown of a linden tree. The sight of him was so repulsive to me, that I had to look again and again. Beneath the well-worn tricorn hat that he wore, grinned a monkey's face with a mouth which he could contort in every way, as well as make his yellow eyes squint in the most ghastly way. His crooked nose almost touched his chin and gave him an almost devilish appearance, which was still strengthened by the disgusting faces, which he made. The people around him found him less sinister than amusing, and shouted all sorts of coarse words at him, which he answered with indecent and inviting gestures.

Then, however, a jerk and a crane of the neck went through the crowd. The sad procession had returned.

Two servants in dirty red coats led a stout older man with gray hair onto the scaffold. Behind him the Red Coat climbed up the steps and immediately stood there with naked arms.

"Heiner has refused spiritual encouragement," said a voice behind us. "He thinks, that the great ones are allowed to do wrong up there in the kingdom of heaven, not only here on earth and so he has no desire to do so."

My father quickly turned around. The voice was silent.

"Cursed pack!" he rumbled to himself. "Good that again an example is made."

Someone read out something at length in a fat, nasally and quite indifferent voice. Two pieces of wood flew onto the scaffold, pieces of the stick which the judge broke. Master Hans approached the blacksmith and

put his hand on his shoulder. That was now his right, and the blacksmith buckled a little. Now he saw that he wore a coarse shirt with black ribbons on it. I had often seen the man working merrily in his forge. His wife was very beautiful and still young. I saw him well now. Under his gray, wispy hair stood the bright drops of sweat on his forehead. Once he opened his mouth and dropped to his knees.

"Y-i-i-i," was heard.

"Plumplumplum," sounded the drums of the soldiers who surrounded the scaffold.

Then the man stood up, ran his hand over his wet, shiny forehead and looked around him in amazement. But immediately the servants threw themselves upon him, forced him down with ropes and straps. One saw how one leg thrust up into the air, was grabbed and bent and disappeared.

I could hardly breathe for fear. A woman screamed luridly. My father was panting heavily through his nose.

The executioner stepped forward, with both hands raised a wheel with a piece of iron on it, lifted it up high and pushed it down with all the strength of his fleshy arms.

A whimper -a scream followed -howling -

"O my -God-oh-oh-oh-"

The wheel lifted again.

"Scoundrels! Damned scoundrels!" shouted one of the crowd. Soldiers rushed to him, pulled him out, and led him to the side.

Screams - screams!

I vomited.

"Get out of here!" my father hissed at me.

I pushed aside shouting people, pushed, pressed, got through - ran - ran - as fast as I could run.

In the evening, I had to sit at the long table in the dining room with my father, and wait until he had drunk his measure of spiced wine and smoked two pipes of tobacco. I too had to drink wine, even though it resisted me and brought nausea. Then I had to walk alone through the corridor where the clock stood with the little dead man measuring and dividing the time. I anxiously held my hand in front of my light, so that the draught would not extinguish it and the old woman jump out of the cabinet in the darkness. If my father had known about this fear, a bed would have

been made for me just in front of the closet, and I would certainly have had to spend nights in it.

At the other end of the corridor a steep staircase led to the maids' chambers. As I passed by I saw that someone was sitting at the foot of the stairs, sleeping. It was Gudel, a brown haired young girl with saucy eyes and pigtails that hung down to the back of her knees. When she carried the water bucket on her head, the pointed berries of her breasts almost poked through the robe. When I looked after her longingly, she laughed with her white teeth and often turned around.

There she sat asleep, dressed only in a short red petticoat and a shirt which had slipped half off her shoulder. I could see the dark tuft of hair in the hollow of her armpit. At my step she flinched, raised her head and shamefacedly put her hand in front of her eyes. I grabbed her bare arm, which felt firm and cool.

"Let me into your chamber, Gudel," I whispered, and was quite hot in the face.

She smiled and climbed slowly, moving her hips, up the stairs. I saw her legs in the mysterious shadow under the red skirt, and a strong smell as of fresh hay and sweat stunned me. She slipped into the hovel she inhabited, and held the door shut, but so weakly that I could push it in without much effort.

"The young gentleman is a nuisance -," she laughed.

I reached for her, and she giggled softly. I was out of my mind and grabbed her and threw her onto the blue bedding, gasping and struggling with her.

"So the Lord put out the light -" she cried, half choked.

I let go of her and blew out the light with an unnecessarily strong breath. It rustled in the dark, the bed creaked. The stuffing of the upholstery smelled musty. The smell of onions wafted warmly toward me. I squeezed my knee between hers ---

"The young gentleman is probably still clumsy -", she laughed again and pulled me to her.

Her arms wrapped tightly around my neck ---.

"But don't tell anyone anything," she said afterwards and caressed my back with her coarse hand.

That's when the door opened. My heart stopped. It was Balthes, the dairyman, with a big horn lantern. Stupid and mute he looked at us in bed.

Gudel took a corner of the sheet in her mouth. Her whole solid body shook with restrained laughter.

"May a thousand-pound seething thunderstorm -" began Balthes, but then his mouth remained open. Gudel jumped out of bed in her shirt, went over to him and said something quietly. Balthes hung his head, pulled a crooked smile and scratched behind his ear. I remembered that he considered Gudel as the house treasure and that they were going to get married.

"Go on, then - go! You know that this is nothing," hissed Gudel and pushed him out the door. His broad back, crouched and strong, had something sad about it. It was the back of a sorrowful man.

It was dark again, and Gudel crept into bed with a quiet cracking of the joints and rolled over to me. All pleasure in her was gone, and I lay very still. Then she kissed me tenderly and sang softly:

"Oh, my brave little rider,
Your steed snorts freely
You may well trot with him
An hour or two."

But I pushed my hand away and said, "What did you whisper to Balthes?"

She laughed:

"You nosy kid -"

And threw herself over me so that her hair tickled my face.

Then I got angry and pushed her roughly. So immediately she lay still and was silent.

"What did you say?"

She shrugged and turned away from me in the dark.

"Gudel, I'm going to give you my baptismal dime - but tell me!"

"Well, what?" she said harshly, "that it's about our marriage property, nothing more."

I did not understand.

"How - about your marriage property?"

"The gracious lord has made it for me, and so I have done it and will do it again, as often as the lord Squire has a desire for a woman. In return,

Balthes and I shall then live on the Wildemann fiefdom and be allowed use of the buildings and lands."

Now I knew.

"And I even had to go to the Spittel-doctor, where the free women are lying inside, and have them look at me back and forth to see if my blood is healthy. I got a note, and the gentleman has read it and told me to see to it that the gentleman squire in good time gets his first gallop on the horse that stretches its legs upwards. So said the gracious lord!"

I sat up in bed. It suddenly stank in the narrow chamber. The air was hard to breathe, and my throat was choking me.

"Aren't you ashamed, Gudel?" I felt as if I just had to cry now.

"Why ashamed?" she cried angrily. "I have to do His Grace's bidding and also give the coarse Lord of Heist a warm bed, as the great hunt goes. I do whatever it takes for me to create."

All of a sudden she grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me with terrible force.

"Spit on me! Hit me! You make dogs out of men, you cursed, you arrogant devil, and respect a poor woman no more than a chair for the night, where you do your needy business when it comes to you!"

Horried, I jumped out of bed and rushed to the door.

Then she ran after me, threw herself down on the ground and grabbed my knees.

"Have mercy! Do not listen to what I blabbed, most gracious nobleman. Do forgive me! I will make it up to you - kick me - but for the sake of God's mercy say nothing to the lord. It would be very bad for me - do you hear, Herr Squire? And I have done you good this night, my gracious squire -"

"Don't be afraid, Gudel," I said, but I couldn't speak any more.

She pressed her hot, wet mouth on my hand, but I tore myself away and went swiftly and quietly down the stairs.

When I was in the hallway, the Dutch clock struck midnight. The closet creaked.

I stopped.

"Why don't you come out?" I said, banging my fist against the closet. But everything remained silent.

Only from above came a wailing, pounding sound, as if someone were crying into their pillows.

On Good Friday, I passed by the Catholic Church and peered on all sides, to see whether Lorle was there.

But all I saw were people going to church, men, women and children, and every time the gate opened, sad deep sounds blew out.

Lorle was the daughter of saddler master Höllbrich, very young, and I had lured her into our park. She wanted to see the tame deer and the fallow deer. And in the feeding hut was where it happened.

I had learned many things in the last time, could swallow wine like water, ride behind the hounds and throw girls into the grass. There were some who wept bitterly. Lorle laughed and said, "There had to be a first time-"

While I was waiting, a small and very ragged boy came, looked at me with cunning little eyes and asked, "Are you Baron Dronte?"

And when I said yes, he quickly pulled a small violet paper from out of his shirt and slipped it to me. Then he quickly ran away.

I was very angry that she had kept me waiting and I remembered that she had also made her little eyes at Thilo, too, when he passed by the workshop. But since I did not want anyone to watch me reading the letter, I went into the church.

It was half-dark, and the candle flames sparkled. In front on a triangular candelabra stood many lights, and just as I entered, one was extinguished. And just then they were singing in Latin the crying notes of a psalm, which I understood. It was called:

"Jerusalem Jerusalem - return to the Lord your God".

Then I knew that it was the lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah, which I knew from the Scriptures.

Motionless, the canons sat in their carved chairs on both sides of the violet-covered altar, and I recognized the cousin of the Sassen, Heinrich Sassen, among them and wondered at how haggard and austere his face looked in the restless glow of the candles and the golden gleam of the ornaments on the walls.

There was a whistling beside me, like mice whistling. There were two old women praying, bent low. And again they began to sing up in the choir with the Hebrew letter that is called Ghimel or the camel. But then the sweet sadness of the pleading song penetrated deeply into my heart and made it open up before God. I thought of how mangy and rejected I must be

before the Savior, who had also taken upon himself the bitter agony of death for me, been scourged, spat upon, crowned with thorns, stripped of his poor clothes and nailed naked to the cross. And what was I? In my pocket crackled the letter of a girl whom I had put on the bad road, and in my mouth was the sour taste of yesterday's wine. I was getting worse and worse, and I already understood it well, to strike a defenseless servant across the face with a riding crop and to chase the old servants up and down the stairs. But then Lorle's laughing face with its snub nose intervened again between the remorseful thoughts, and in my ear hummed the solemn sounds that came from above, her cheeky little song:

"Phillis has two white doves and a golden bird's nest..."

But out of the saucy face of the little girl grew another face, pale and pure, with golden red hair like a halo, and with a fierce, never before felt homesickness, I thought of my dead cousin, Aglaja, whose memory I had held so miserably that now any one was right for me. Then it was suddenly as if dark rays were pressing into my eyes.

Slowly, from out of the crowd that was devoutly praying in the nave in front of me, a man approached. It flashed through me as if a glowing drop ran from the top of my head down through my body. The man, who was coming closer and closer, looked at me...

His face was without any wrinkles, brownish and beautiful, his eyes deep and dark, of unimaginable goodness. Between the brows there was a horizontal, fine, red scar, like the one I had...in the same place. A small black beard shadowed the upper lip of the soft, noble-cut mouth. A reddish brown robe fell in heavy folds around his slender body. He wore a black turban wound around his head, and a necklace of amber beads. No one seemed to pay attention to him except me. Nobody turned to look at him, and yet everyone avoided him, as if they saw him.

"The Lord Jesus," I stammered, reaching for my heart, which threatened to stand still. I felt as if I had to weep and lie down on this breast, hand myself over to him, to him who knew everything that pushed and drove me, so that he could save me. He knew the way, his feet had walked it.

But he passed me by with a look in which was something like sorrow. He passed me by!

I stood for a while and could not move. Far out in the room sounded singing and the roar of an organ.

Then I got hold of myself, turned around and ran after him, causing enough annoyance among those praying, because my haste had disturbed them from their devotion.

But when I stepped out of the gate, the place lay empty.

Nobody was to be seen. Only the tobacconist stood next to the wooden Turk in front of the door to his store and looked at me in amazement.

I hurriedly asked him about the man in the brown robe.

He made a face and said that the incense in the church must have made me dizzy. I was unaccustomed to such Catholic incense. And one who honors the pure gospel should beware of the dazzling works of gold, lights and blue vapor, which they have in such churches of Baal. Let every man beware lest he stumble, even if he is of noble birth.

Angrily, he threw his lime pipe onto the pavement, so that it broke, turned his back on me and went into his store.

But I walked around the alleys that led to the square and asked about the man. No one knew anything about him.

Suddenly I felt as if a bolt of lightning had struck in front of me. I remembered the wax figure that had saved me in my earliest childhood, when the falling ceiling in my room buried my bed.

The man from the Orient, Ewli.

I pulled Lorle's letter out of my pocket and tore it into a thousand pieces.

I drifted with Phoebus and Thilo Sassen and we hunted everywhere for women and adventures. Since I spoke to them about the apparition, they laughed at me and teased me for days. They called me the brown monk, as they called the man from the Orient. I had fallen back into my old way of life and was ashamed every time they came at me with their jokes and snide remarks.

That day black Diana was barking and full of joy with me being at home and whatever I did, I did not succeed in shooing her away. Because the dog loved me more than anything, no matter how well I treated her.

Above the vineyards we knew a house, in which an old tusker lived, feared for his coarseness. He had two young and beautiful daughters, and it was said that they spent the money for their pretty dresses and shoes by being kind to the gentlemen. The boys had often put a straw man on their

roof, and the girls in the city pulled their skirts to themselves when they passed by, so as not to touch.

But there was also talk that the old man, on days, when he had time to look after the prostitutes, would teach the rude rascals, the beaux of his daughters a lesson. Thus it was said that he had once caught Fritz, the mayor, a real dandy and a womanizer and apron sniffer, with the two of them in the tool shed and had so brutalized him that the young gentleman had spent four days in bed groaning and smeared with lime ointments. Others again thought that it was not so much the beating of the old man, which had made a cure with ointments necessary, but rather a disease of the nobles that Fritze had contracted when he was traveling with an actress in the mail coach.

Surely we had not the slightest desire to collide with the foul-mouthed tusker, and all the less so because the house was outside our jurisdiction and the archbishop, to whose property the vineyards belonged, had great affection for the tusker and was only happy when he heard from his little pieces.

So we wanted to approach the house unnoticed in the manner of a creeping patrol, to know for the time being how things stood there. Thereby the dog, which could not be removed in any way, was a hindrance and a nuisance. Because in the joy of being able to be with me, Diana jumped around us in great leaps and bounds, and when I was not always paying attention to, she made me by barking loudly at me, which annoyed Thilo and Phoebus beyond all measure.

So it happened that our approach completely failed. When we were already close to the house and our eyes on the windows, the bitch made a noise and lured not only the girls but also the old man, who soon realized what kind of polecats were creeping on his hens. He called us whoremongers and good-for-nothings, day thieves, country bumpkins, and knights of the shrubbery and promised to serve us with such unburnt ashes, that our lackeys and chamber pot carriers would have to deal with us for a full week.

So we crept down the mountain full of anger and rage.

"Next time we will try it without you and that dog-beast of yours, Melchior!" said Thilo.

"One who doesn't even know how to master such a lousy four-legged beast belongs in the children's room!" added Phoebus.

I did not answer, but inside the rage ate at me.

Then Diana jumped at my hand and grabbed it playfully with her teeth, as if she wanted to make up with me. She always did that when I scolded her or was otherwise in a bad mood.

Then a sudden anger seized me, and I bent down for a large stone. The dog believed, she was now going to play the beloved game of fetch and crouched, whimpering with joy, ready to jump. With all my might I threw the heavy, angular stone at her and hit her in the ribs with a dull sound.

The bitch fell, emitted a howling, high-pitched scream, and then wailed in shrill tones, unable to rise, her pitiful, horrified gaze fixed on me.

"Die, you bitch," I screamed and lowered my hand.

Phoebus and Thilo, who were to blame for this, immediately drew back from me.

"Your father's best and perforce trained bird-dog -" said Sassen, and the other added that crudeness against a noble animal was unworthy of a Nobleman.

The bitch tried to get up, collapsed and came up again. Hunched over and whimpering she crawled towards me, tried to reach my hand with her red tongue to lick it.

"Come!" said Phoebus to Thilo, and walked with him, walking away from me with obvious contempt.

Then I sat down between the vines and took the bitch's head in my lap. Blood flowed from her fine nose onto my light robe. Her eyes were directed at me plaintively, begging for help. Her body trembled, the little legs twitched as if in spasm.

Aglaja's white hand had so often rested on the black silky hair of the beautiful head.

"Diana!" I cried, "Diana!"

She pulled her lips from her white teeth. She laughed in this way. Once again she tried to lick my hand. Then in her eyes came a green, glassy glow, her body convulsed.

I stroked her in deathly agony, calling, coaxing -- she no longer moved. A blood bubble stood motionless in front of her nose. No more breath came --

"This beast will bring her lament before God on the Last Day, and God will also give her His justice, like any other creature", a deep voice spoke.

I looked around with veiled eyes.

The old tusker was standing next to me, and the sun wove a terrible golden glow around his snow-white head.

My father had returned from the hunt and went with ringing spurs up and down in the room. The floor creaked under his riding boots. I looked steadfastly at his green coat with the silver braid. When he turned around, I saw the tightly twisted braid. This braid was merciless, black, stiff, insensitive, a symbol of his nature.

"Lout, pray!" he thundered again. "You have dared, in front of the street rabble, to hit Phöbus Merentheim in the face, to the amusement of the scum of craftsmen and other fellows? Hey?"

"He said that my mother, before her marriage, was bed warmer to the Duke of Stoll-Wessenburg," I blurted out and looked my father in the eye.

"You don't hear and listen to that kind of thing," hissed my father and became dark red in the face. "And remember: Do not disgrace princely blood! You will ask the young Count Merentheim for forgiveness, lad!"

I did not understand him. Was he serious?

"Answer me," he cried.

"Never," I said, "I will not."

"Damn dog! Swine! So I've got problems again with another of the duke's huntsmen, and I can wipe my mouth. I need the intercession of old Merentheim, you wretched knave. Do you understand me now? Will you or will you not?"

"No."

He raised his hand, but lowered it again. With a heavy step he left the room. In the afternoon he sent for me. He sat in the same chair in which grandfather had died, and next to him on the table was a half-empty wine bottle. The room was blue with tobacco smoke.

"Stand here," he said, pointing in front of him. "Tomorrow I'll send you to high school, so you'll be out of my sight. And so that you know the truth, whether your mother was once the mistress of the noble lord, I don't know. But in any case, she has given this property to me. Whether you come from my loins or from those of Serenissimi or whether even that windbag of court poets in one of the duke's Venetian overnight parties - that scribbler whom Heist later shot down in a duel, only God knows. I almost

want to believe the latter, for from a true and right nobleman you have nothing in you of the old bread and butter.

Now you know what Merentheim wanted to rub your nose in. You may have that in you. Process as you wish. I have nothing for sentiments. Everything is as it is, and nothing can be dismissed. The Jew Lewi will give you the money for school every month; there is nothing more, now or ever. If you go to the dogs through partying and drunkenness, like many a nobleman, I or Serenissimus or the hunted down court poet had a son. You can save yourself the trouble of writing because I don't read letters and other written or printed stuff, although I once learned to do so. If you come back to me as a real cavalier, then I will assume that you are from my seed. And now troll yourself away!"

I wanted to say something, but the words died on my lips.

Slowly I turned around.

A glass flew after me, smashing against the wall. Angrily, my father shook his fist at me as I looked around once more, and in his eyes there were bloody red veins.

Below, old Stephan stood and muttered:

"Don't believe a word the Herr Junker says! Your mother was a saint and is enthroned in God's countenance!"

Then I fell around the neck of the faithful servant and cried out for my mother as if I could call her from the grave.

It was a tedious journey.

Every quarter of an hour we had to get off the stagecoach at the behest of the driver and push and clean the wheels with a mud knife. The horses trembled and snorted, and their flanks were covered with foam. And once we had to chuck our suitcases and travel bags and then lift them back onto the roof and tie them up again.

With me rode one, who was from Austria, was called Matthias Finch and seemed to be a cheerful man of good manners. His clothes and linen pointed to a son from a decent family. He was not a nobleman.

As we approached the city, the coach stopped in front of an inn called "Zum Biersack". We looked out the window on both sides and noticed that the street was filled with chairs, benches and a long table, at which sat a party of students, looking wild and daring with greased boots, round spurs, feathered hats, and swords. They sat quietly, smoking from long lime pipes,

spreading their legs and did not seem to be willing to give way to the mail wagon on the army road.

A straggly half-grown thing with bobbing breasts under the cloth ran between this table and the dirty inn, swapping the empty pewter mugs for full ones and shrieking under the coarse grips of the journeymen she had to pass.

The driver half turned with a grin and said:

"May it please the gentlemen to get off and allow themselves to be welcomed?"

"Drive on!" urged Finch. "The road is clear!"

"What's that stinkfox barking about?" rumbled a deep bass voice from the table. The one who had shouted was as bulky and thick as a six-bucket barrel, and his three fold stubbly chin was resting on his badly smudged vest.

"Let it be, Montanus," shouted a tree-tall man with blonde hair and a sharp, crooked nose. "They'll crawl out of the burrow in time."

Since we saw that nothing could be done with defiance and pounding, and that the others were masters in such things, we came out, but we had enough sense to order the driver to take our travel belongings to the tanner Nunnemann, with whom we had ordered lodging through the messenger.

We had hardly crawled out of the yellow box when they also quickly moved the table to the side and told the driver to put the steeds to the trot. He did not need to be told a second time. But two of them took us under their arms and led us into the interior of the house. There they pushed us up the stairs into a long, low room. On a table covered with wet glass curls lay an earthy, yellow skull, which looked as if they had just stolen it from the charnel house, on two crossed swords. They immediately lit two tallow candles in porcelain, placed us at the narrow end of the table, themselves around the table with their hats drawn, shook each other's hands across the table and sang in rough voices:

"The covenant is solemnly sealed
By the noble oath of allegiance,
Our hearts are unlocked
Strike only of true friendship.
This sword shall pierce

The one who leaves brothers in distress.
And, by this leg of the beast!
A thousand times he is threatened."

When the song was over, Finch, who had looked at me several times in amazement, spoke up and said:

"Gentlemen, forgive us if we would like to know in what illustrious company we have unawares fallen into?"

"Insolent stink-fox," belly-laughed the fat man again, the one they had just called Montanus.

In the meantime they had put their hats back on, and I saw that their plumes were carmine, yellow and blue, and the blond one with the vulture nose had also put on a fox tail, which gave him a wild appearance. At Finch's speech, he pulled his bat out of its scabbard and hit the table with it so violently that it boomed and we were badly frightened.

"Silentium!" he shouted.

All was silent.

"As a mule you came from your mother's apron, and as foxes and the future night terrors of the Philistines, you have entered the sacred halls of the Amicist Order, immature and foul-smelling, but partaking of our grace. We do not want to leave you to the pathetic institutions of the compatriot societies, which will be in the next hostel lurking on chaises and mail coaches, and we do you the honor of not even asking you about your obscure origin. Do you want to be alone and without a distinguished comitat, as a mockery of all right lads, or shall the high Order solemnly escort you in as members?"

Finch and I looked at each other. Already on the trip we had decided to join one of the student unions because we knew very well that the lonely and defenseless could not be happy because of being stepped on, being pushed off the sidewalk and otherwise jostled. After all, it did not matter to us which brotherhood took us in, and since it happened that way, the Amicist order was all right for us.

So we nodded and said that we would like to be counted among the high Order.

A violent trampling with the feet took place. This is how the applause for our decision was expressed.

"Omnes ad loca!" cried the tall one. "And you Foxes, just stand still!"

All sat down and one of them, about our age, ran to the door and roared with all his lung power:

"Cerevisiam!"

Immediately a bumping and rumbling started. Two bartenders rolled in a stately barrel, placed it on the collar and tapped it. The girl with the messy hair carried such a number of mugs in each hand, that one would have thought she had twenty...fingers. They were filled and overflowing with foam, and placed in front of everyone.

"Out, profane pack!" shouted the tall one again and hit the tabletop with his club.

The servants and the maid hurriedly trudged away from there.

"Come to me, foxes!" he commanded.

They grabbed us, roughly enough, and brought us in front of him at the other end of the table.

"Put your hands on this death's head and the crossed blades and swear!"

We obeyed and willingly recited an oath to him, in which we pledged our allegiance to the enlightened and high Amicist Order until death and unbreakable loyalty to its members, brotherly love and help of all kinds, and to other people the deepest secrecy. If we broke our oath, our chest would be pierced by sharp steel and our faces would become like that of the skull on whose boney dome our fingers lay for the oath.

"I am the Bavarian Haymon," said the tall one. Profanely, I am called the Baron Johann Treidlsperg from Landshut. But what are your names?"

We gave our names, and one wrote them in a booklet, which was bound in crimson, yellow and blue.

"Bend your heads," Hans ordered.

We did so.

In the next moment, each of us had beer running down our faces, necks and shoulders from overturned jugs. When we looked up coughing and spitting, under the thunderous laughter of about fifteen lads who were in the room, we were given our Order names. They called me "Mahomet" and Finch "Nebuchadnezzar". Then we had to sit astride the chairs. The others lined up in a long row behind us, and in front of us rode the Bavarian Haymon around the table, helping us with his spurred legs, while everyone sang a song:

"The fox wants to go out of the hole,
There stands a green hunter outside of it.
Where from, where to, you young fox.
Today you do the last jump.
And I'll do my last dance,
Kiss me, hunter, under the tail.
The hunter did not do it
And had to let the little fox run.
Yee-haw, yee-haw, yee-haw!
Optima est cerevisia!"

Then it was on to hugging and kissing.
On our hats, which were too new for the Amicists
were therefore bent and pierced many times,
Then they put the tricolored hats on us.
Again, the one they called "Portugieser" had to go to the door and
shout, "*Coenam!*"

And with great speed came a large wooden platter with roasted
chicken, rice with raisins and hot wine sauce, baked fish with green salad
and ducat noodles with sugared brandy. Then the scrawny thing was
allowed to stay in the room and had enough to do with dodging ankles and
pouring beer mugs.

"This epicurean feast is provided to Mahomet and Nebuchadnezzar
by the illustrious Order", announced Haymon and ordered us, moreover, to
drink a full measure for the good of the entire brotherhood, without
stopping.

"And lest I forget," he shouted in the commotion. "to the brave
postman who brought you here so beautifully to the 'Beer sack' with his
coach, each will dedicate a hard thaler!"

Over the daily life of the carouser and wild parties I forgot everything
in a few months. Our favorite place was the "Kind Prince", where they
served heavy brown beer and good Mosel. The Bavarian Haymon had
already returned from the first intoxication to sobriety and had spread his
spurred boots on the table where the stars of the spurs tore holes in the dirty

tablecloth. The shirt stood open over his hairy chest, and his sleeves were rolled up, but he did not take off his hat with the feather trim from his head.

The Portuguese lay with his head on the tabletop and snored. Finch or Nebukadnezar sat bent over on a chair in the corner and puked back the wine he had drunk so that it stank sourly and foully in the whole room. Hercules, a weak little man from Meissen, had caught a louse, let it crawl around on a plate and laughed beyond all measure.

Montanus knuckled with me. He had the terrible pig. Again he knocked the leather mug on the table and gaped with watery eyes at the throw: Five-three-one.

"Pregnant fleece - tripod - polyphemus", he bellowed with joy. "Gimme that mammon!"

I had only thrown five in the whole. With his hand, he raked in my last ten silver pennies and clapped his hands on the sweaty shirt of his fat belly with joy.

"Venus! Where is the old sow?" he then shouted toward the door.

The old waitress came. She wore a wooden nose on her face by two ribbons that ran across her forehead, and was grizzled all over. We called her Venus. What she was called by her real name, she probably no longer knew herself.

"Bring the boot, the big one, with Mosel wine, Dearest of hearts!" ordered Montanus.

Finch came to the table. He was white in the face from puking so much and smelled from the throat.

"You have to eat sometimes, Nebuchadnezzar. -" puffed Montanus. "You only drink all the time and eat nothing. That makes ulcers in your stomach, brother, like happened to Gideon of blessed memory. All his blood jumped out of his mouth and that was the end of him."

Finch burped and pointed to the table.

"Ei, brother, say, why are you so tenderly concerned and yet you have stolen from poor Mahomet his aunt's money? Spend some of it!"

Venus came and placed the large glass-boot before the fat man. It held three full measures of wine. Montanus caressed the vessel, let a sound that came from under the table, and laughed muffledly:

"What I buy - I will also drink! Alone, most estimable!"

"Drink alone?" Finch's eyes grew round. "That's what the stupid devil from the cathedral at Cologne believes."

"If you bet your sword with the gold-inlaid Toledo blade, then I'll swallow the boot in one go!" bellowed the fat man.

Finch wiggled toward the sleeping Portugieser and gave Hercules a rib-bump. The Bavarian Haymon came closer and helped to wake up the snoring Portuguese.

"Wake up, open your little eyes, brother pants- full - you shall be a booze judge!"

The Portuguese raised his head, grunted, and ran all ten fingers into his frizzy hair.

"I got lice - damn!" he yawned.

Hercules burst into a silent laugh.

He knew where the vermin that had crawled into the sleeping man's hair came from.

The Bavarian Haymon was appointed judge.

"Here we go!" he slurred.

"Huh - brrr!" Finch waved his hands between them. "The mastiff has bet nothing against his boozing. What are you putting on the table, your belly?"

Then Montanus pulled a thick silver watch out of his pocket; a short chain hung from it, and on the chain hung a polished ball of carnelian stone.

"This here!" he said.

"Go, go!" everyone now shouted. "Drink up!."

Montanus stood up instantly in spite of his heaviness. The soft, monstrous belly hung over the waistband of his bulging pants.

"Until the nail test!" resisted Finch, who was in fear for his beautiful blade.

"Will suck yellow ox milk to my end, if a drop remains in the glass," the fat man boasted, raising the boot glass with both hands.

"And now attention!"

He opened his mouth wide, put his lower lip tightly to the glass and let the wine gurgle down his throat with a loud belch.

"Hell, plague, and whore child!" cursed Finch. "He does it, by the devil's ear-washes - he does it!"

Only a residue was left in the glass, not worth mentioning. But still too much.

For before it ran down, Montanus opened his eyes wide, as if in a sudden fright, so that one saw the blood veins swell in the white eyes, and

his face became dark blue. Then the boot fell and broke into pieces. The hands let go of it and reached into the air. A gurgling came from the open mouth. And then fat Montanus fell like a sack to the floor, so that the chair, which he was dragging along, crumbled under the weight of his body.

Haymon, who had studied medicine for many years and understood some of it, knelt down by him, let his hand rest on the chest of the fallen man for a while, then stood up and groaned, "Died! Apoplexia! Has already gone to Hell, our fat goose-eater. *Fiducit!*"

Sweat stood on his brow. I felt nauseous.

But Hercules bent down nimbly, reached into the pockets of the dead man, found the purse and shook a few coins and a Marien ducat onto the table.

"There you have your winnings, Nebuchadnezzar", said Haymon and immediately pushed Finch the silver watch with the chain and the stone. Then he tossed me the pennies and nodded:

"Take it! He will never need it!"

Then he weighed a ducat in the flat of his hand and said to the suffocated:

"Heart brother! This gold fox will be drunk to your memory!"

But the dead man gave no answer, and so Haymon shook him a little, so that we heard the wine rumbling in his stomach.

"He doesn't say no!"

"And now someone call Venus," ordered Haymon.

"It would be a pity if we left the money for the Manichaeans in the bag. The Jew shall see for himself how he comes to his own, and thus the bear remains firmly tied. - Do not stand there, Mahomet, like a stuck calf, but call Venus to fetch some wine and bring poor Montanus on to some straw in a quiet chamber!"

Then I went out into the dark corridor and called out to Venus in a trembling voice.

On the evening of the day when the Jew Lewi told me that my father was no longer going to send any money and that after so many pranks he was now leaving me to my fate, I drank myself crazy and full.

Later, the Portuguese came and told us that Phoebus Merentheim had arrived a few days ago and had been employed as a parlor boy by the tall Count Heilsbronn on the Gerbersteig.

I left immediately and the entire corona with me. We put a cracked night tile on the head of the stone Roland at City Hall, and on the wall of the beautiful and virtuous Demoiselle Pfisterin, who always had her back turned as we walked languidly by, on the wall just below her window Hercules drew with red chalk a delicate buttocks and wrote with big black letters under it:

All the kisses I sent you,
Connected, you are quite charming!

Then we went with many hussahs and hellos over to the city fountain and drove wooden wedges in its four copper dragon tubes, so that the water above, beneath the feet of St. Florian began to bubble. But we courted the mayor on the top five steps of the staircase and stuck a goose tail feather in each pile, because it was said that the Mayoress was dissatisfied with him in *puncto puncti*.

Soon, however, I remembered Phoebus again with his snooty rice soup face, and I urged on to the Gerbersteig.

"Shit, Mahomet - take it easy, he won't run away from you now!" Haymon held me back. "You shall drink his blood today!"

For they still had something to do at the pillory. When we arrived at the goose market, the Portuguese had already prepared a paper, a hammer and nails, and while we were keeping watch, he struck the paper against the pillory so that in the morning light everyone could read it and our tormentors and enemies could be recognized:

"Shmule Levi, a Jew and a bloodsucker,
Abraham Isaac's son, likewise,
Liborius Schmalebank, calls himself a
Christian,
Gothelf Titzke, goes to church service every Sunday,
Simche from Speyer takes a hundred percent."

We moved on again, and in the dark we shouted at the top of our voices:

"*Mordio! Firerio!* So help us!" until all the windows were lit up and the sleepy city soldiers came trampling down. In the meantime, we were

already on our way to the Gerbersteig.

"It is as I tell you," murmured the Portuguese,

"Merentheim lives in the same room as the Count of Heilsbronn and is with the Ansbach Student Union."

"Didn't the Count of Heilsbronn steal the red haired Jule from you, Portugieser?" teased Galenus.

"Shut up, or I'll let out all my water against you, so you'll drown miserably", growled the Portuguese angrily. "I have already wiped fifteen of you off my club with two fingers."

"Give peace!" admonished Finch. "Otherwise take your blasphemous speeches before the Committee. - You'd better watch out how little Phoebus will shit his bed linen with fear!"

So I stepped forward, just in front of the window, which the Portugieser had pointed out to me, pulled out the little saber and began to wet my feet on the pavement.

I shouted at the top of my lungs:

"Merentheim! Dog fart! Come out and present yourself!

Pereat!"

Then the window opened, and a stark naked guy looked out.

"Pereat!" I shouted. *"Pereat Phoebus Merentheim!"*

"Camel!" echoed down from above. "What in thunder do I care about your Merentheim who today at two o'clock went to his kin over there?"

"I hope you don't choke on your stinking lie!" I shouted against him.

The man above laughed:

"You shall have your share, brothers! You just have to be patient, Hans Unknown, until I've donned my shirt and have a sword in my hand!"

And he slammed the window shut so that the glass shards rained down.

But then we saw a little light wandering in the room until it was dark again. We heard footsteps in the corridor; a key turned in the lock, and in the doorway appeared the tall Count Heilsbronn, dressed in shirt, pants and a long sword under his arm and his hat with the scarlet and white feathered cap of the Ansbachers on his head. The moon was just coming out from behind the clouds, and it was light enough to see the wild, scarred face of the old braggart.

"All by the rules, Herr Brother!" interposed the Bavarian Haymon as we wanted to quickly draw our blades. "You, Portuguese, serve as second

for the Ansbacher Herr and me for Mahomet! Get ready! Go!"

I pushed nimbly, but didn't hit him. He parried as fast as lightning and was at home with all feints. I hit a wrong quarte, because he drove under me and sliced, burning my upper arm. I quickly fell back and struck hard, slid off and stabbed him deep in the chest. The sword fell rattling from his hand.

"Stop there!" immediately roared the Portuguese and held his blade in front of me.

"That sits," gurgled Heilsbronner. "A lung foxer."

His pitted face looked green in the moonlight.

"Take me - to bed, Herr Brother - to"

He fell into Haymon's arms, spat out quite a bit of bloody foam and rolled his eyes. There was a dark stain in his shirt that spread like spilled ink on a bad piece of paper.

"By all the sacraments, help me hold the man," gasped the Bavarian Haymon. "He makes himself heavy as if -"

We jumped over and took hold.

"When I fall asleep, it's over for me", whispered the Ansbach man and blew blood again. "The rosary above my bed is moving back and forth by itself. If only I had had my heavy intoxication, you might have long stood there and shouted *pereat* -"

And shrilly:

"It crushes - me - my - heart -"

We lowered him to the ground. I broke out in a sweat.

"He's gone," shouted the Portuguese. "You take to your heels. The windows are already opening."

From above they shouted.

"Damned boys and ragamuffins! Won't you be quiet down there?"

"I want to salt their hams with rabbit shot," one shouted rudely.

We heard many feet pattering, coming closer. The guard ran up.

"One of them never moves. - Guard! Guard! *Mordio!*" clamored a woman.

We ran as fast as we could, a jumping stick flew between my feet, so that I would have fallen. Haymon stayed beside me, the other was off. We had heard screaming. He had jumped over a fence and sank deep into a buried cesspool. They had him all ready.

"Brother!" The Bavarian Haymon breathed in quickly from the long race and leaned against an old wall. "Your stay here is no more. I know the

Portugieser. They will be hard on him, and he'll whistle. And at night they'll get you out of bed. Take my advice, brother, you've always been faithful and it's a pity for you that we forced you into a drinking and roughhousing Order:

In Thistlesbruck are recruiters of the King of Prussia, who let trumpets and violins and wine flow, and gold foxes patter on the table."

"Soldier - you mean? -" I asked, trepidatiously.

"Do you want to be excavated tomorrow and lie in the tower on the straw with the bed bugs? You know that there will be no help from the principal and the senate, if someone has to take the blame. If you still had your mother's pennies - but like this! There is no other way, comrade, than to run behind the calfskin. There you are as safe as if you were in Abraham's bosom."

I was frightened and bitterly remorseful about the years of my youth, which I had so wickedly squandered.

"Don't fool around," urged Haymon.

"I mean it honestly. And if it hadn't happened with the Ansbacher, how long would you have been able to play with your feathered cap and a racket? There is one thing called *ultima ratio*, and this is it. No amount of twisting or intriguing can change it. By day and dew you can be in Thistlesbruck. By the bridge you can already hear the roar in the 'Merry Bombardier'. And now, old Swede, God protect you, and so that life may bring us together once again." He kissed me quickly on both cheeks and turned.

"Here you can have my rapier, and here - cut off the four silver buttons that still hang on my Gottfried," I said.

But Haymon only shook his head mutely and disappeared into the shadows.

Slowly I walked along the road to Distelsbruck.

I tore the crimson-yellow-blue feather from my hat and threw it into the next stream.

And went on.

I was sick to death from the Hungarian wine, tobacco smoke and noise for three days. Whenever the timpanist struck the cymbals, it drove like a painful lightning through my devastated brain.

"O my Bärbele -!" howled one of the caged birds, with whom I was sitting at the table.

"Yes, and what will the Herr Father say?" jeered the hussar who was guarding us, so that no one could escape who had taken hand money and drank to Friderici's health. The lad bawled even louder. Then they held a glass of wine to his mouth and tipped it. So he had to swallow, if he did not want to completely suffocate. And then he became silent.

"And you?" the moustache turned to me. "Did you do something wrong, that you got into the yarn of the recruiters? You don't seem to me to be one of the stupid ones."

The sergeant came up to us, decorated with gold cords and dressed up with braids and buttons, so that the poor peasants would run more easily to him.

"That's the best of them all," he said to the cavalier and pointed to me. "The only good ones are those who come of their own accord. For the coat with the blood- splatters, fellow, you get a new one from His Majesty!"

And in the rosy glow of the approaching day I saw with horror that my right sleeve showed many dark stains, stains from the blood of Heilsbronner's death wound. For this I was now cruelly sold. I looked around like one who is drowning in wild waters and looks for rescue.

But there was no help.

All around were soldiers with a cold look and at the table were the poor rogues who yesterday and before yesterday had jumped in the dance with the prostitutes and had thrown thalers, feasted and shouted and talked about the merry life of a soldier, which would now begin. In the doorway and in front of the window stood a hussar with a loaded carbine, and I had to follow behind one of them in a red monkey uniform with a saber and saddle pistol.

In the miserable room it smelled musty from spilled wine, and from the puddles, of those who had let it trickle out of their wells in the corners. A haze rose that bit into the eyes.

"Stop that doodling and whistling!" the sergeant suddenly shouted. The music stopped and the tired musicians puffed out their breaths; they went to divide the money that lay in heaps on the table in front of them. The sergeant buttoned and thoughtfully knotted the golden tassels and catch cords from the dolman, carefully wrapped them in paper for another time and then shouted into the hall:

"Up, lads, up! Everybody get going!"

"Where to?" shouted a cheeky one with a cheese-blowing face.

"Where to? Where they dig a hole in the sand for you and put three shots over it, snotty nose!" laughed the sergeant.

"Whoever still has wine in his glass, throw it down. The wagon will be harnessed, my little birds!"

He drove us out. There were eight of us on the ladder wagon. On the trestle sat a hussar and two behind us. The others trotted alongside. The Moravians pulled up. People came out of the houses and talked quietly with each other. One wept bitterly when she saw the soul-seller driving away with his people.

"Oh, dear Lord!" one of them wailed. "O Mother, mother! Let me go free -"

Then the sergeant trotted up and shouted:

"Shut up, damned fellow!"

"Mercy, Herr!" cried the poor wretch.

"Let me, for the blood of Christ, just this time go free and single! I am so sorry!"

"Have you already wet the seat, peasant girl?" he sneered from the horse. "Look at the student there next to you; he's not twisting like a maiden the first time. Now let up with your snorting and blubbering!"

The boy raised his hands and whimpered:

"Have mercy! I can now and never live the hard life of a soldier -"

Then the non-commissioned officer drove the horse so close that the white foam from the bit flew onto our coats, and roared in a horrible voice:

"Peasant sow, dirty one! Should I leave you right here on a slab, or should I wait until we get there, where we will soon be, and have you flailed, so that you can't pull your pants off the open flesh, you bastard, you recruit's ass!"

Then the lad hung his head and kept silent.

We went out of the village, and the children followed us for a while. But they didn't scream, as children usually do at every spectacle. They stopped by the two linden trees at the wayside shrine and looked behind us with wide eyes.

But there was one that sat by the lime trees and looked at me, with the same eyes - full of compassion and pure kindness. It was a man in a reddish-brown robe, with a string of yellow beads around his neck and

chest. Under the black turban around his head was a face of indescribable mildness and beauty.

It was the man who had approached me in the church when they sang the lament for Jerusalem.

Ewli, the man from the east.

I jumped up from my seat and spread my arms out to him. But suddenly I did not see him any longer. Only the gray weathered stone of the Wayside Shrine was between the old trees.

"What are you up to, recruit? Do you want to run away from us?" shouted the sergeant.

I sat down on the shaking and bumping board, and in spite of all the misery I suddenly felt light and joyful, as if nothing serious could happen to me for all eternity.

It was a thousand times and a thousand times worse than I had ever imagined, and now I knew, how to deal with the common man. Of course, there were some bad fellows among my comrades -.

I was the musketeer Melchior Dronte. I concealed my nobility, so that I would not get more scorn like pepper added to a bitter meal.

My shoulders ached from the rough blows of the corporal's baton, which danced on all of us during the exercises, my left eye was swollen from the lieutenant's beating me with the riding whip, my hands were chapped and torn from the rifle lock, and pus oozed from under the nail of my right thumb when I attacked something. Vermin itched and ate all over my entire body. My body was tired to death.

So that morning, when the drums were going, I could hardly get up. Twice I tried to lift myself up, and twice I fell back. The barracks elder poured a bucket of ice-cold dirty water over my body and pulled me out of bed by my legs.

The old soldiers were a thousand times rougher than all the officers and non-commissioned officers.

To one who remained in a deep sleep, they stuck pitch on the big toe and set it on fire. There was a great laughter, when the poor devil, half mad with fright, howling and screaming ran around in the sleeping quarters.

Quickly we washed ourselves at the well, crunched up lice, which got between our scratching fingers, and drank our half nösöl of brandy, which the camp followers poured out, with the black bread. The braids were

twisted together so that the back of the head ached, the gaiters were buttoned.

When we were standing in the yard, the hazel sticks were distributed from man to man. They had lain in the well water all night and whistled venomously when they cut through the air.

The battalion stood in two ranks.

"First rank - two steps forward! March!

Halt! -About face!"

Two long, endless lines stood face to face.

The provost brought the deserter. He was from my unit.

He was a tall, very young boy with sunken cheeks. Apart from his pants and shoes, he was wearing only a dress shirt.

He was shivering from frost and fear. Kregel was his name.

All the sticks stood steeply in the air. Two sergeants walked at our backs to see who would be casual about the beating.

The drums started pounding and the man was pushed into the alley. He ran. The sticks whistled, clapped down on him, the tatters flew off his shirt and skin. He shouted something that you couldn't understand. I hit him on the neck, and saw raw flesh splattering. But he was through, and outside he fell down on all fours. They grabbed him and pulled him up. He groaned.

"Forward!" shouted the provost.

The deserter's eyes protruded out of their sockets, saliva ran from his open mouth. His lips were torn. He was running again. The sticks struck smacking, blood ran, and chunks flew. The man jumped, bent down while running, whined like a dog, stretched out his beaten and swollen hands, pulled them back screaming when a blow hit the knuckles, fell to the ground and collapsed like a sack at the end of the double row. He lay motionless, gray in the face. One could see his heart beating furiously under the bleeding skin; under the back, on which he was lying, a dark pool formed.

The army doctor came, took a breath and laid his hand on the ribs of the prone man, then beckoned two soldiers and told them to turn the unconscious man over. Then he pulled out a bottle of wine spirit from his bag and poured it on the torn back.

With a piercing cry of pain, the runner came to.

"He's beeping again!" said the man next to me, Wetzlaff.

"They always recover their strength with the palm leaf!"

They picked up the senselessly slurring man and pushed him into the alley for the third and last time.

But this time he did not get far. After a third of the way he fell down, and as much as his comrades tried, even from behind by beating him with a stick urging him on, he did not move any longer.

"Now he is done for!" said one of them, and the sticks lowered.

But all of a sudden the fallen man jumped up and shot like an arrow through the alley. A few blows hit, the others missed. Furious, the corporals beat those who had allowed themselves to be fooled.

"Such a false dog - such a cunning scoundrel!" they scolded.

Outside the alley, the runner stood still and smiled in spite of his pain.

From above came a peculiar giggling sound. We looked up. At the windows of the officers' quarters stood a number of preened ladies, holding handkerchiefs in front of their mouths and laughing their heads off.

"Plum - plum - berum!" Warned the drums, urging us to move in.

In the guardroom, an oil sparkle was burning. The wall was thickly stained with squashed bugs. The bottles of brandy were empty, and the tobacco smoke drifted in blue clouds under the sooty ceiling. It had been a retreat for a long time, but no one stretched out on the cot.

"If only she comes, Kinner!" said Private Hahnfuss, "but such prizes are smarter than clever!"

But he had not yet finished speaking when the door opened and Wetzlaff entered with the girl.

The sergeant nodded, looked at the thing with a half a glance, and then, as if by chance, walked quickly out of the guardroom. Behind him the door was immediately locked and barred.

The soldier-Catherine now stood alone among the many men in the middle of the room and looked from one to the other. Her cheeky smile became anxious and shy. Her hood was crumpled, the striped skirt was stained, and the heels on her shoes were badly worn. She scratched her hip. But when everyone remained silent, she became afraid and made a movement as if she wanted to run away. She threw a stray glance at the closed door and then she said with a gulp in her throat:

"Well, you won't let me out, boys?"

"That's the way it is, girl," said the corporal, putting the burning sponge to his pipe.

"You lied to us. Didn't you?"

"I keep my mouth shut," she said, "what's this all about? What am I supposed to have lied about?"

"We asked you once how it was with your internal health, girl - didn't we? Because otherwise - we would not touch you! And now look at Beverov! - Come here to me, Beverov!"

One of the guards stepped forward. The corporal opened his coat, vest and shirt.

The man's chest was covered with nasty red spots.

"Do you know what that is, little Cathrine?" the corporal asked treacherously. "They are - real Frenchmen aren't they!"

In the girl's face shock alternated with fear and anger.

"From me? From me?" she shrieked and put her hands on her hips. "You pack of louses, you tripe eaters - I'm still with the sergeant - let's see if -"

"It's the same!" the corporal interrupted her and at the same time hit her so hard on the mouth that she cried out.

But then she was silent. A drop of blood stood on her lower lip.

"Down with the skirt!"

She screamed, squealed like a rat, kicked her feet and bit. But it did her no good against the fists that were angrily attacking her from all sides. In a few moments she was standing in the pathetic nakedness of her spent body, writhing under the hard hands that held her wrists and arms.

"Bring the lamp!"

The corporal shone the oil sparkler all around her. A hot drop fell on her skin, making her cry out.

"Don't worry - you're not going to be roasted!" he reassured her. "Look, comrades there -!"

And he pointed with his finger to many white spots, which clearly stood out from the brownish skin of the neck and the shoulders.

"Do you still want to deny that you have the French, are contaminated and infectious, you lout, you?"

She did not answer. But then she raised her head and spat her reddish saliva right into the corporal's face.

"Well wait, you human!" He said calmly and wiped his face with his sleeve.

"What do you think comrades? I'm for some horseplay."

"Do it!" everyone shouted. "Horseplay!"

"You are a fungus from birth," continued the corporal, blowing the stinging smoke of his smoldering pipe into her face. "What do you want to be? A fox - or what?"

"Damned pig," she hissed and cringed, snatching at the restraining hands and snapping.

"I want out! Let me out! Let me out!"

"Black is my favorite color!" the private shouted into the hubbub. "Give me the boot polish -!"

Amidst roaring laughter, in which the voice of the desperate creature was drowned, they spat into the jerk-off boxes, dipped the coarse brushes into them and went to it.

So far I had sat on a cot as in half anesthesia and watched the incomprehensible to me happenings. But now I was seized with horror and agonizing pity for the miserable, broken and destroyed creature. I saw how they reached for her, heard the insane shrieks and screams of the martyred woman, as they dragged her by the hair and stepped on her bare feet with their clumsy shoes. She squirmed like an eel, screamed with a squeal when one of them approached with a whip in his hand, whimpered for mercy and in one breath uttered the most vile curses.

"What do you want with the wench?!"

I shouted at Wetzlaff and held him by the sleeve.

"Well first she must be scrubbed shiny," he grinned in my ear. "And then she must run at the long leash until she can no longer. That's our horseplay, boy!"

A shrill scream went up. The corporal had grabbed her from behind and held her tightly, however much she resisted.

"Go for it, comrades!" he encouraged the others.

Then I jumped over, tore his hands from her trembling body and stood wide in front of her.

"Let her go!" I shouted loudly. "Let her go!"

"Oho!" he roared back at me. "Look! Dronte!"

With his fists clenched and his face contorted in anger Wetzlaff stepped toward me.

I looked at him firmly and calmly.

His angry eye strayed from mine, his clenched fists opened.

The others fell silent, looking at me as if amazed.

"Comrades," I said, "have mercy. She is not guilty. And she is as poor and abandoned as the rest of us!"

No one answered.

I went to the door, without anyone trying to hinder me and opened it. Then I bent down, picked up the prostitute's rags and gave them to her.

"Go, Cathrine!" I heard myself speak, in the surrounding silence.

She stared at me with wide eyes, bent down as if to kiss my hand, then laughed hoarsely and was out in one leap. We heard her walk on bare soles along the stone-paved courtyard. Nobody said anything.

Slowly, people put boxes and brushes to their designated places. One of them yawned loudly.

Then Wetzlaff laughed strangely, stood in front of me, swayed his head back and forth and looked at me penetratingly.

"It is so," he growled. "Dronte has it in the gaze- He has the power in his eye."

No one remarked anything to it.

Silently they stretched out on the hard cots to get some more sleep before Ronde arrived.

Ronde came.

Kregel had been missing for a week, and no one knew more than that he had received a letter from home, about which he was visibly offended and upset. He was one of the abandoned Germans who lived in the stolen land of the area of Kolmar.

One day a royal forester came to the Colonel and reported that children had found a soldier hanging in a tree. They had however, immediately ran away in fright and now no longer knew where the place was. And so he thought one or two companies should search the forest so that the dead man could be buried in the ground.

So we went in search of Kregel and roamed through the large pine forest. As we slipped through the thickets and sticks it happened to me that I got completely lost from the others and when I shouted for the others as commanded in such cases received no answer.

When I was so alone with myself, I had to think about Kregel, who was now freed from all torture and torment. How, was it not most clever, to put this dog's life behind him? I thought how yesterday an eighteen-year-old boy, the Squire von Denwitz, had stabbed me with a rapier, the tip of which had lead embedded in it, because there was a chalk stain on my coat from cleaning the white stuff; how the corporals beat us to our hearts' content, how miserable the food was that was served to us like sows in large tin buckets; how the bread crunched with sand when it was cut. All this would have been bearable. But that no hope showed itself, how and when it could ever get better, that one day after another was filled with curses and sorrow, to allow another, just as gruesome, to rise, that was the bad thing. For man must have some hope, if he is not to wither and wilt.

In this hard school, which God's hand had thrust me into, I learned to force myself. I didn't make a face when my breast ached from burning pity for the unjustly mistreated, and I kept silent about the most severe insults which I received by anyone who was elevated by a braid or finer cloth. Perhaps it was a punishment that had come to me. But then it could also be an eternal justice, but how was that possible when far worse than I could live in joy and glory until the end of their lives. So why did this burden of suffering fall on me? What purpose could higher powers, if there were any, have pursued with me by placing on me burdens of my own and other people's torment, to endow me with the finest sensibility for every injustice

that happened to others and gave me more sensitive feelings than probably all my comrades? They cracked their jokes even when the worst and most unbearable of arbitrariness had happened to them, and found full consolation with a glass of schnapps and in the arms of their soldier's wives.

I was mad at everything that had hitherto been upright and consoling of my being and I could not believe what was happening in front of me day in and day out, I could not believe in a divine meaning of all these events. What does a person do who lives in a chamber with hostile, crude, violent, bad, cowardly, false, and evil people and sees no one in the whole circle, who wants to create order and justice and has the ability to do so? One leaves such a chamber. He closes the door behind him and rejoices, to have escaped the abominable existence in such a room.

So I now thought to act. Kregel, the poor lad from Alsace, had shown me the way. And there were enough trees all around; I wanted to attach my trouser belt to some branch.

I prepared to walk across the small sunlit clearing to finish my last deed in the deciduous wood when I had to stop, because in the middle of the open space sat someone, and I was not alone.

It was the man in the robe with the black turban. He was resting on a tree stump and his walking stick lay beside him in the forest moss. His noble hands held the string with amber beads. It was Ewli.

Once again the strange man, whose small image was under the high glass dome in my children's room, stepped in my path in an intangible way. How did the stranger in his unusual dress get everywhere? Unmolested, and not even noticed by the children, he had been sitting at the wayside shrine, when the Prussian recruiters came for me and my companions of fate, until the recruiters took me and my comrades away on their wagon.

At that time I could not connect him with myself any more than I could about his mysterious interest with my person in the prayer-filled church. And just as I did not find him in front of the church anymore, he had disappeared from my view at the lime trees of Distelsbruck. This time, however, he was to speak to me before I started the work of self-destruction.

Nevertheless, I could not put one foot in front of the other. Because the man from the Orient was not alone. In front of him stood a deer, which rubbed its narrow head flatteringly against Ewli's knees. In his hand, which held a birdcage, perched a jay with a pinkish-grey head and blue wing

feathers, and in the bramble bush to his right chirped uncounted colorful balls of feathers. Two squirrels, chasing each other, a reddish-brown one and a black one, went up onto his body, hiding themselves in the folds of his robe, rolling and chattering, and to my horror the reddish brown one suddenly disappeared into his robe, as if it had melted into the same color of the coarse fabric, while the second one crawled onto the black turban, lost its outline and did not appear again. I looked at the face of Ewli, overcome by the radiance of his eyes. Was he looking at me? Were the dark stars directed into the far distance? I did not know, I just felt how warm, divine love enveloped me.

Slowly, however, he stood up, walked across the clearing and disappeared between the tall trees.

Then I came to and was able to move. I ran. Where were the animals? Not a bird, not a deer was to be seen. Where was Ewli? I ran into the middle of the high wood and suddenly stood among my comrades. They had just found Kregel and cut him down. Horrible to look at, black-blue and green spots on his face, the swollen ink-colored tongue stretched out, with open, complaining eyes, he lay on the ground, the rope in the furrow of his neck. Nobody paid any attention to me.

They had spades with them and dug in the deep, soft forest soil, where the mouse tunnels ran crisscross and root snakes crawled.

It was late when we were finished.

In the evening-red sky an endless train of crows flew silently.

"That means war!" said Wetzlaff and looked at me.

How long had we been in the field? Nobody reckoned anymore, nobody knew.

I was camped with four comrades in bitter winter. We had found makeshift quarters in a burned-down farmhouse. All we had were two piles of rotten, damp straw and a blanket singed by campfires. And this miserable property we had to protect and guard, so that not even more miserable ones stole it.

The rifles had to be constantly cleaned without stopping. After a day they were red again with rust. Zulkov had frozen the toes of both feet. They were black and stank like the plague. I had to treat Repke with gun powder and a residue of brandy to wash out a graze on his back because no one else would do it, and he screamed so loudly that I took pity on him. Wetzlaff had

gotten severe diarrhea and every five minutes he walked on wobbly legs in front of the house. Where he had squatted the snow was bloody all around from his stool. In the night he moaned so much, that no one could sleep. And although we all endured, they threw everything at him in the dark that they could grab with their hands. Then he limped out again to relieve himself with convulsions. The quietest of us all, a gloomy person named Kühlemeik, read in a small, tattered hymnal next to the fire and sometimes murmured:

"O Lord, have mercy on me a sinner!"

Repke was happy when I had bandaged his back again with old rags, and put dry nut leaves in his pipe.

"The king has said -" he wanted to begin.

But Wetzlaff interrupted him snorting:

"He has said! He has said! If the King lets one go, you miserable wretches are blissful with doglike awe. Oh, you starving ribs, you cannon fodder! What is it then that makes such a king so great?"

"Fridericus Rex is the greatest war hero of all time, you poisonous toad!" roared Zulkov. "Dare not to insult His Majesty!"

"Dear brothers in Christ," pleaded Kühlemeik, "turn your thoughts to the One who has entrusted all of our lives in His grace-giving hands!"

"Shut up, old pietist!" Repke shouted at him, "Let Wetzlaff speak!"

"Oooh!" he groaned, and hurriedly ran out again. We heard the sound of his discharges and his groaning all the way into the house. Then he came back again, white as lime, and let himself fall on the straw.

"As I say, a man must edify and revive himself in the Lord and King," Zulkov said after a while. "But there are some who forget the oath..."

"Do you mean me?" asked Wetzlaff, straightening up with difficulty. "Refresh yourself, as much as you can with that cold fire that you have on your hind claws. Yes, you sheep's head, so that Friederich can be a great war hero, you must keep your toes in your shoes, my intestines have to bleed out, a thousand have to be shoveled into the pits. I ask one, when all around, with the Austrians over there and us over there, if there were such guys as me, there would be no more king and empress, but also no war and no people-beating. But you are in general too stupid to understand such things. And from this stupidity of yours all kings and generals, princes and counts and barons down to our squire with the ass face live equally in glory and joy and sit enthroned like peacocks in all majesty, while we are kept as

cattle and are driven to the slaughter with the trilling of pipes and the beating of drums. O you damned, thick-skinned fool, you horse-apple brains..."

He fell silent, exhausted, breathing heavily.

"Not everything he says is a lie," murmured Repke.

"You too?" roared Zulkov, spitting on the ground. "Oh, about you Germans! You misjudge what alone is necessary for the salvation of the German nation, the army and the wise hand to guide it."

"Germans are over here and over there. Have always been a poor, betrayed people," said Repke.

"It's a pity that I've shot my powder outside, Fritze Zulkow," sneered Wetzlaff. "Otherwise maybe you would like a warm plaster glued to your mouth with all the strength of your body, you foot stinker, you are the miserable archetype and symbol of the subservient subject. Decomposing even in a living body and still singing the praises of the one whose furies flay us and torment us until death. But you just wait until they put me on outposts again. I'll cross over; I'll cross over, so help me God... O hell, filth and Satan -- it overcomes me again --!"

With a staggering leap he was up, and again we heard his blood gurgling outside.

"He has a bad fever!" waved Repke at the enraged

Zulkov angrily. "He doesn't know what he's talking about in his pain."

Then Kühlemiek raised his nasally trembling voice and began to sing from his book, so that we all shuddered:

"The abomination in the darkness,
The stigma in the conscience
The hand that is full of blood
The eye full of adulteries,
The naughty mouth full of curses,
The heart of the scoundrel is revealed."

"Oh my God -!"

It was I who cried out thus.

Then a loud trumpet blared. - "Alarm!"

Zulkov shouted, squeezing his sore feet into his frozen shoes.
"Alarm!"

At the glow of the extinguishing fire, we gathered everything together.

Distant shots.

The trumpets began to scream all around.

Wetzlaff stumbled in.

"Up, brothers, up! We want to light up the royal bastard's home. Vivat Fridericus!"

That was Wetzlaff.

Bent with body ache, he took up his rifle. Zulkov moaned softly with every step. All around there was noise, horses neighing, clanking. But in all the raving, running, shouting orders and muffled noise of the shooting in front swung mewling and horrible the merciless voice of the pietist, who sang his song to the end.

Dreadful fear descended from the tones. The fear of what would happen after death. The drums were beating.

Heavy smoke rolled in thick clouds, dissipated, came in new blue-white balls, and dissipated again. Fog and stink lay over everything. Dull roaring thuds, crashes, whipping bang, chirping of bullets. I stood with the others in lines and ranks, bit off the bullet twisted in rancid paper, kept it in my mouth, poured the black powder into the hot barrel, ran my fingers between my teeth and pushed the cobbled lump of lead down with the ramrod until it rested firmly and the iron rod jumped. Just as it had been drilled into me. Then powder on the pan, with the thumb on the cock, aimed it horizontally, and into the wall of fog in front of me, in which shadows were moving. The stone gave off sparks and it flared up before my eyes, and then came the rough recoil against my sore shoulder.

The lieutenant on the wing waved the halberd and shouted.

"Geg - geg - geg," was heard, not understanding a word.

A big iron ball rolled and danced across the frozen snow, then a second one. A third bounced along beneath us and smashed Kühlemiek's feet out from under him.

"O Jesus Christ!" he cried out, crawling a little on his hands in his own blood. Then he fell with his face in the snow, became silent.

"Flü - flü - flüdelideldi," lured the pipes.

"Plum - plum - plum." The drummers worked with sweaty faces. The legs lifted and lowered in time with the beat, one was sitting there, with his head between his spread legs.

The blister on my heel was burning, the lice were crawling restlessly on my scratched skin, and there was a rumbling in my guts. I looked around... rows, rows of blue coats, skinny faces with small mustaches, white bandoliers, and bare barrels.

"Kühlemiek - Kühlemiek - miekeliekelielik", trilled from the lips of the pipers.

In front of us a row of red lights flashed. A cloud of gray smoke rose behind it.

Repke roared and grasped with both hands between his thighs. A tall soldier leaped like a carp and drove with his head into a snowdrift, his feet stretched upwards. Next to me, one screamed like a frog. I could still see the blood pouring out of his ear, before he collapsed to his knees. Zulkov suddenly had no head anymore, walked next to me and sprayed me with hot blood. Then he fell down. The squire was knocked backwards as if he had been hit by an axe.

Wetzlaff sat down first, screamed, "I can't," and then lay down.

In front of me crawled a man who was blind-shot, and Ramler had his right hand twisted and hanging out of his sleeve. He looked at it in amazement and stayed behind. His rifle fell to the ground.

Large shapes came swaying out of the haze, and quickly became clear.

White coats, black cuirasses. Broad blades stabbed at us, horses' heads snorted, fled to the side startled. A horse stood on its hind legs in front of me. I saw the rider, who was holding the hand with the broadsword hilt in front of his face, with his left hand clasping the saddle horn. I saw the whiteness of his coat under the edge of the dark armor and hastily thrust with the bayonet. It was soft. He fell forward onto the horse's neck, glared in my face, and cried out.

"You-!"

It was Phoebus Merentheim...

He rattled down. I no longer saw him. But another one came, lifted himself in the stirrups and hit me on the head with lightning speed, so that I staggered around. The edge of the tin hood cut my forehead, warm and thick water flowed into my eyes. My feet went on. My arms pushed the

barrel forward with the bayonet. I tore it from the neck of a brown man. The horsemen were gone all at once, vanished.

"No rest - no rest - no rest," the drums murmured.

I slept while walking.

We were suddenly among houses.

A woman cried out in fear; fell on her face with her arms outstretched. A pig ran between us. Then there was a small forest in front of us. People stepped on bodies, on guns. A dog, skinny and with its tail between its legs, crept past. A peasant lay there with his body open - without intestines. The dog came from him.

There were bushes, white-ripe, dense, and impenetrable.

I crawled into them. Moss lay there on a pile as if someone had gathered it together. A bed, a bed. I burrowed into it. No one saw me. Wonderful, warm, soft moss.

Somewhere in the snowy forest lay the rifle with the bayonet, with Phoebus' blood on it, the tin hood and the bandolier with the sidearm.

I had been wandering about the border for many days. I had found the torn coat in a shot-up house, the pants on a hanged man. The right leg had received a weeping wound from frost and vermin, which bit and hurt me, my nose and lips were etched from the running sniffles. I had slept in barns and haystacks, teeth chattering, and the previous years frozen and woody rotten beets had to fill my stomach.

In this inn on the country road it was the first time that the landlady gave for God's sake a bowl of warm food to me and allowed me to sit at the back by the warm stove. If, however, distinguished guests came, I should generally trot myself out and not be begging for something around the tables, she said.

The barmaid also took pity on me and secretly slipped me a large wedge of bread, and just as stealthily she poured my empty glass full of thin beer.

I, the baron Melchior von Dronte, had lived the life of the despised and the poor, the outcast and the lawless. And with the most miserable of them, I had sometimes found more Christian charity than among those who were sitting in their own chair in the church.

But how hard people had been against me in the last days! Of course, these were the times that no one should open the door to a stranger in bad

clothes without necessity. War and terror all around, victory and parley, robbing, plundering, desecrating and burning without end. So it was like a miracle to me that the landlady said:

"Come and eat and warm yourself. You look like the death of Basel."

Not far from me at a small table sat a merchant or cattleman in a light, thick fleece, a large Hessian peasant hat next to him on the bench and a satchel over his shoulder, the leather flap of which was inlaid with all kinds of brass figures. The face of this skinny person was the most disgusting, that I had ever encountered in my life. Soon he pulled his wide mouth into a gap that reached from one of his pointed ears to the other, and then he stretched it out like a pig's trunk to drink from the glass. His vulture nose lowered against the upwardly curved chin, and his yellow wolf's eyes, in which the black was transverse and elongated like those of a goat, squinted pathetically. Nevertheless no one seemed to pay any attention to the ugly one but I. And sometimes it seemed to me, as if a chirping and whistling sound as of mice came out from his bulging satchel. Not infrequently he rolled his squinty eyes toward me and laughed impudently at me, as if we were old acquaintances. I racked my brains, in fact, to find out where I might have seen this mask before, but as hard as I tried, I could not think of it.

After a while, a beautiful carriage stopped in front of the inn, and several handsome merchants entered the drinking room, and were very courteously welcomed by the innkeeper's wife and the barmaid.

Then I thought that it was now time for me to go, and crept out of the door.

But when I found myself on the wet street in the roaring dew wind, I held my fluttering rags with my hands to cover the worst of the bare spots, there was such a shrill laugh right next to me, that I collapsed. The man with the hunter's hat walked next to me, as if he had been my companion all his life, and looked at me piercingly from the side.

"Well, your Baronial Grace," he grumbled, "what peculiar garb I must find you in again. The new, lavender-gray little coat suited you better that day, when you were watching with your strict father, as the magistrate cracked Heiner's rough bones."

I looked up, now I knew where I had seen him. It was at Zotenbock, where he had been hanging around in the linden trees, eavesdropping at the market place.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Me? I'm just Fangerle," he replied, suddenly quite humble. "I'm glad when, with much toil and trouble I fill my blue satchel so that my master, who is called the Highest- Lowest, can be content. I now have an extremely annoying job and would be really happy if someone wants to take some of the work off my hands. It is nice money to be earned. Don't you feel like it, your Baronial Grace?"

"Listen," I said, raising my ash stick. "I am in great distress, but if you have come with your gallows face to mock me, then I will show you that even in rags I can still be a gentleman, if need be."

He ducked his head as if he were afraid, and asked me not to be rude. He was a joker by trade, he said, and as such earned a lot of money at peasant weddings and funeral banquets. And whether I got angry if he said it now - it is a disgrace that one of the house of Dronte is in such an outfit, when it would have been no trouble to earn a bare hundred thalers in a few moments. And before I could reply he reached into his satchel with his crooked fingers and pulled out a handsome canvas pouch, in which it clinked.

"A full hundred," he whispered in my ear. "Hihi - hoho!" he laughed, and it was as if an echo came down from the skies.

But it was only a great train of crows and Jackdaws, which moved with Krah and Kjak in the sky, and when I looked up, a crow detached itself from the flock, swooped down and fluttered very low above our heads, so that I saw how it moved its cunning, black ball eyes. At that the thin man straightened up and called out to it:

"Black Dove, go and tell the Highest - Lowest, that Fangerle is on the way and to take the quiet one his consolation!"

"Krah - Krag!" cried the bird and shot after the others.

"What are you chattering about?"

I prevailed over my uninvited companion, who was jingling his money bag.

"What are you talking about?"

"This?" he gave in reply. "One of my jokes, nothing else. Remember: If you're riding in a wagon and there is a barking mutt, like your master father's black Diana, following behind, you need only turn and tell the animal where to go. Then it will leave you immediately. This and nothing

else I have done with the raven. Otherwise Master Hämmerlein's songbird would fly with us."

My eyes were glued to the clinking money bag, and I thought of how I could equip myself with a hundred thalers and become a human being again.

There was another strange squeaking in his satchel.

"What do you have in it?" I asked, pointing with my finger, "that it squeaks like that?"

"There in the blue satchel?" The merchant made a face. "It's little animals that I've caught and bring them to their place."

"What kind of little animals?" I pressed him.

"Soul mice, tiny soul mice that I've been gathering around there."

"Soul mice?"

"It's just a word," he laughed, reaching into the sack and quickly pulled out a small, shadowy-gray thing that wriggled and screamed. Quickly he hid it again, and although I had not been able to see what it had actually been, a violent shudder ran through my body.

Then came a howling gust of wind and almost pulled me down. The money bag fell out of the old man's hand. Flashing, brand-new thaler pieces rolled out. He quickly picked them up from the ground and threw them back in with the others, and once again my desire for all that money awoke.

"What must I do to make the money mine?"

He stopped, rolled his eyes, and muzzled his mouth.

"In a moment, my boy, my brave boy, just be patient until we reach the two Ka- Ka -"

A fit of coughing almost tore his throat.

I followed the direction of his outstretched hand and saw a chapel by the road, not far from the village I was walking toward. I hurriedly strode and the merchant, who suddenly seemed to get sour from walking, only followed with difficulty.

When we came to the little church, he stopped, bent over and scratched himself with his nails behind his pointed ears, with his mouth hanging down.

"Now you will tell me," I said angrily, "or do you think you can continue to mock me?"

Then he became completely submissive, bowed to me and said softly and almost shyly:

"Baron Dronte, I am a coward, and I am afraid of many things that a brave soldier does not fear. There is one lying in there, and he's dead, so he can't bite. In his hands are two wooden sticks, one long and a shorter one, which I must take from him for all the world. It is only a handle and a hitch, so he must leave them."

"That would be robbing a corpse," I stammered, startled.

"That would be the gallows."

"Many names exist for the businesses in which there is much to earn. And there are many gallows, but most stand empty."

Under his broad hat, his eyes glistened like St. John's beetles.

"I'd love to," he croaked hoarsely, "but I can't touch such sticks. Everyone has their own characteristics. Like, for example, many a man would rather die than touch a toad with his bare hand. "

"What kind of sticks are they, for which you have such a great desire?"

"Don't need them," he hissed crossly. "Only that the one in there shall be free of them."

Again there was a clang and a sound. My wound hurt. The water stood in my pierced shoes and bit open my frostbite.

"I'll do it," I said, and reached for the door handle. He looked at me like a hawk. It dawned heavily. The wind rumbled over the steep roof of the chapel. The trees rustled.

I entered.

In the middle of the whitewashed room, in the corners of which the darkness was already eerily stretching, there was a coffin in front of the altar on the collar. A single light flickered at its head end. A guard sat on the floor and slept. Next to him glittered an empty bottle.

In the open coffin, however, lay an old, distinguished man with a face in which life had drawn furrows and wrinkles. He was dressed in a new coat made of black, watered silk; also the vest, the leggings and the stockings were black. A white, well coiffed state wig framed the wax-yellow, smartly pinched face. In his folded hands he held a small wooden cross.

I had seen many dead people and even had to help bury them. I didn't feel much at the sight of lifeless bodies that were left to decay. But this old man with his wise and so unmoving face, in which countless joys and sufferings had been marked, this defenseless man, whose guardian lay there in deep drunkenness and left him defenseless and exposed to everything

that might befall the lonely church. I took pity on him. And what was I supposed to steal from him?

Then I recognized it: It was the death cross, which his hands were holding tightly. I was supposed to snatch it from him.

This should not be difficult. I took hold of the cross. Who sighed there? I almost fell to the ground from fright. But then I got hold of myself, remembered that the dead are dead forever, and reached out my hand again.

But I lowered it. What did it matter to the merchant with his disgusting eyes of a bitch, whether this deceased was brought under the lawn with or without his cross? And now he would give me a talking to, the barnacle-eyed fellow with his thalers.

I went toward the door. It was only two steps, but I looked back at the dead man. He was lying quietly and peacefully, and as if in great fear, the pale fingers closed around the cross.

I had to think of the despicable guy who had hired me. How could this madman or villain think that I would take the cross of a lifeless man away from him?

What had he been chattering about, how the ravens flew over us?

"To take the silent man's comfort -?"

And when I thought of it, it shook me coldly. I quickly went up to the sleeping mortuary attendant, grabbed him by the shoulder and called out:

"Wake up, man! Robbers are outside --"

The peasant, who was wearing a coarse shillelagh, jumped up and looked at me in alarm.

"Where?" he slurred.

"Outside," I said again and closed the door behind me. I heard him quickly slam the heavy latch shut.

As soon as I stood outside in the breeze, crooked fingers clawed at my tattered coat, two eyes shone like brass, and from a black gaping mouth he bleated:

"Throw them away; throw them away from you all at once!"

"What do you mean, cursed one, that I should throw them away?" I shouted in his face.

"Our Lord Christ's cross -?"

Fangerle bent back as if I had struck him in the face, twisted and turned like a worm and began to run, cross-country.

The wind raced behind him, whistling and whirled up his coattails, and as he was carried away into the twilight, it seemed to me as if instead of him a giant bird with black wings soared over the furrows, just as owls fly. I stood without money, abandoned and damp from the dew on the lonely road.

But then I remembered the satchel with the soul mice. Who was screaming so miserably in the hunting bag of the evil one -? The evil one!

A paralyzing fright crept into my legs. Calling on the name of God a hundred times, I went towards the next place and did not dare to look around.

The gypsies, with whom I had long been walking, the brown Romi, as they called themselves, had wandered back across the border, and I had to separate from them, if I did not want to be married by the provost to the rope maker's daughter.

My misery was boundless. Here and there I found some work and food in the farms, I even received a damaged piece of clothing that was even better than my rags, but most of the time I was starving and freezing to death. One day I was lucky and found half a loaf of bread on a country lane, which had been lost from a cart. And when I saw the ruins of a castle on a mighty, wooded hill, I decided to light a fire in a hidden place in the walls, so that I would not have to spend the icy winter night without the comfort of close warmth.

After some climbing around in the rocks I soon found a still fairly preserved vault, on the whitewashed wall of which still the remains of Al Fresco paintings could be seen. Among other paintings also the wedding of Cana was depicted (as I could see from the remains of clothing and heads, as well as the large, ancient wine jugs), and when I saw the mural, which was in a bad state of disrepair, I noticed that one of the wine jugs bore the barely legible inscription:

"Hic jacet", or "Here it lies".

Perhaps it was a joke that the painter made for himself, telling the thoughtful observers that in these jugs and in the wine that fills them, in fact something lies and rests, namely the spirit that enters into the body of man with the drink and gradually unleashes all passions, which overwhelms and rapes the mind, through intoxication; but perhaps it was also said that all gaiety slumbers in the round belly of the pitcher and after drinking the

drink, it would froth up in laughter, cheerfulness and songs. About this and the like, I pondered until the lack of the warming fire made itself violently known and forced me to tramp up and down in the spacious vault for a while, in order to warm myself and to let my stiff hands be used for starting the fire.

When passing the unfortunately only painted brown jug, I could not help but tap the thick belly of the vessel with a bent forefinger, even though its rounded appearance was only the skill of the painter, who through the distribution of light and color had achieved a high degree of plasticity. But when I playfully tapped at the seemingly round curvature of the drinking vessel, I felt as if it had a dull, wooden, and hollow space. I knocked again, and two or three more times. The sound gave way at the place where the Latin words were written; it differed from the sound of the walled environment.

Following a sudden impulse, I peeled off the paint and the lime with my blunt knife, dug a little and immediately came to a wide, rotten storage cache. I increased my efforts, and soon the old wood was crumbling away in brown flour and damp splinters, exposing a small niche in which lay a round, greenish-white mold covered sphere.

After some hesitation, in which I saw that the object was a decomposed human head, I plucked up my courage, reached in and pulled out a completely decomposed leather sack, which made a fine sound when I lifted it out. It was heavy with metallic contents.

Then I made a fire, probably also for this reason, to calm my hammering heart by doing an indifferent work. When the little fire was burning and flickering merrily, I proceeded to examine the leather container, which the inscription on the wine urn had advised. Those, to whom this sign had once been made because of the danger of forgetfulness, had been dead and gone for many years, perhaps buried under the rubble of the castle.

The bag offered little resistance. It fell apart as I carried it to my fire, and its contents rolled ringing on the damaged stone floor.

My breath was taken away by the sheer joy of it.

Doubloons, sun-crowns, guilders rolled out of the greasy, wet bag and flashed in the glow of the dancing flames.

I laughed, shouted, and leapt around the fire. I let the blessing run through my unwashed fingers, shook the coins into my hat, stroked them,

and twisted individual pieces between thumb and forefinger so that they reflected the embers, paving the floor with them and throwing ducats in the air to catch them again or to search for the unrolled ones among the debris.

But then reason prevailed. How easily the firelight, my foolish shouting and stamping could attract passersby and betray me and my refuge! In great haste and yet cautiously I tore my sweat-glued shirt and produced by knotting and folding a kind of money bag in which I concealed the not inconsiderable number of gold pieces and hid them on my bare body. When I was finished with everything, I pulled the smoldering wood apart and thoughtfully descended the hill of ruins to reach the next town in broad daylight. This I succeeded in doing and after a short time of sneaking, searching and cautious questioning, I found the store of a junk dealer.

I told him that I was a runaway soldier and that I needed clothes, linen, shoes and a warm coat. Fortune demanded that I had come across a reasonably honest man, who, though not cheaply, did not cheat me for inordinate profit, and even had a bath prepared for me against good money and an ointment that freed me from the torment of the vermin. The only thing that bothered me was the hurry, with which all this had to proceed, and the visibly growing restlessness of the man, as daylight gradually began to fade.

At last, however, his insistence became tiresome to me, and I asked him gruffly whether the chosen people practiced hospitality in such a way, and how he seemed to hold it in low esteem that I had willingly let him earn a nice piece of money. For I was well aware of the price at which worn clothes and worn linen and clothes were traded. Nevertheless, I would have paid what I had received without question as if it had just come out of the workshop of the tailor and garment maker. Then the Jew laughed and said:

"The gentleman has probably also been rendered a service so that he may have cleaned and equipped himself in all secrecy, so that the bailiff does not even look after him, when he crosses the street. If the gentleman were a Ben Yisroel, one of my people, it would be a pleasure for me to house him. But because the gentleman is from the others, it must not be so. Because it is Friday evening, which we Jews call Eref Shabbiss and it is against our custom, to suffer strangers in our festive house. May the Lord forgive; I know well that he is a Purez, a distinguished man, who has

suffered from the Balmachomim, and may he go his way in peace and forgive that it cannot be otherwise!"

Thereby with a deep bow he tore open the iron door of his store and politely beckoned me to leave.

Only when I was standing outside on the street did it occur to me that in his way he had acted honestly toward me. For it would have been easy for him to keep me in his house and betray me to the king's troops lying not far away in their winter quarters. Despite the armistice, they could have picked me out and abducted me, and with some skill the Jew would have not only had a reward, but also the money hidden on my person, which would have not gone unnoticed to his quick eyes. Thus it was not by my cleverness, but by my good fortune, that I had escaped the greatest danger to my life.

For the sake of safety, I decided to wander deeper into the country and far away from the border to make use of a mail coach.

So I trudged on my way in the thick snow and strove towards a village in which I intended to spend the night.

At the entrance of the respectable and, judging by the clean houses that were spared from the war, prosperous location stood an artwork, the sorrowful mother with her son in her lap. The base of the sandstone had been freshly plastered, and so I immediately noticed a few figures and strokes on the white surface drawn with charcoal which I knew as "marks", as the country and traveling thieves call their secret signs. When I was with the gypsies I had learned such science, which is useful for everyone to understand.

But these signs on the wayside shrine were about murder and burning and I shuddered when I deciphered their meaning.

Undecided what to do with them, by no means to carelessly disregard the threatening message for other people I stopped. When I wanted to go I noticed that a few steps behind me was a lean, white-haired, very stately and upright peasant, who looked at me with a less than friendly and piercing look.

"I suppose the gentleman is coming to see us?" he said lurkingly. "I will show him the way to the inn."

And with that he walked beside me.

The village mutt, which wanted to come at me with loud barking, gave way with retracted tail before his hard look. The people before the

houses pulled their caps before him.

"Here it is."

The peasant pointed to the door of a large house, in front of which a couple of fellows stood chatting quietly.

"Enter."

That sounded like an order and gave me a jolt.

"Ei, is this the only inn in the big town?" I turned mockingly to my companion. "And how do you know that I want to enter this one?"

He looked me sharply in the face with his cold, blue eyes and replied only briefly:

"It is best for the Lord to enter here!"

I complied with the strange compulsion, entered and sat down at a table on the wall under the deer antlers. The old man sat down with me, had wine brought, set fire to a short silver-beaten burl pipe and said:

"You look like a man of status in spite of your rather scuffed clothes. The question is how you have come to so lonely a wandering?"

"Aren't you being a bit too curious, Herr Mayor," I replied. This was the title he had been given by the little girl when she had poured the wine.

"Curiosity, as you call it, is the right of the established against strangers. Besides, here I am the authority. So you want to tell me something about your status, name and what you are doing. Its better speaking over a glass than on the bench in the basement, if one is the judge and the other is the indicted."

This sounded like a threat, and I would certainly have responded sharply if there had not been something special in the man's nature and especially in the look of the man, there was something that I did not want to resist. The mayor also knew how to get answers to the questions that he addressed to me so cleverly and forcefully that I, not knowing why myself, shared my entire life to him with the greatest frankness. I admitted that I had deserted from the army of the great king, not out of cowardice, but to flee the cruelty of a state that seemed to me to be an excess of servitude and annihilation of free will which had become abhorrent to me.

"Young Herr," said the old man thoughtfully. "In such a way it can still take a good course with you. As I hear from your speeches, you have had pity on the poor man, and that is a great and precious rarity among people. To what extent your unprotected youth pushed you into ruin, I

cannot judge for the time being. But I hope that a suspicion which distresses me and which is very threatening to you, will prove to be false."

"What suspicion?" I asked, astonished.

"Be patient," said the mayor. "Where will your wanderings take you?"

"To my homeland," I answered.

"Tell me," he continued, again looking sharply at me. "Why did you stand so long in the snow looking at the wayside shrine?"

Gradually, his imperious way of asking put me in harness, and I briefly asked him whether he thought of himself as a judge who had a poor rascal before him.

"That is what I think."

He laid his hand firmly on my arm.

"You know that I am the mayor of this village and as such I ask you: Do you have anything to tell me about the welfare of the village?"

"Yes," I said quickly. "Your village is threatened by a grave danger."

It was as if a kindly glow flitted across his weathered face. But it became immediately serious again, and he said, apparently indifferently:

"Gee up! Who told you that fairy tale?"

"It's not a fairy tale," I said, glad to bring in my nearly almost committed grave omission. "Believe me, you are in danger!"

"Go ahead and speak, Squire."

"There are certain signs," I said, "by which the murderers and the marauders announce their wickedness to each other. I found such signs on your wayside shrine. Now you know why I stopped in the snow."

He made a movement as if he wanted to reach out his hand to me, but dropped it and asked dryly, where I got such dubious knowledge. I reminded him that I had already told him about my time with the gypsies, who understood such things well.

The old man laughed briefly and his wrinkled face came near.

"Perhaps it true that I also know something about such things?" he murmured.

"You?"

I shook my head doubtfully.

"We could try it out," he said and poured me some wine. "Describe the signs to me, and then let's interpret them together like the old magicians of whom we read in the scriptures."

"Very well," I said. "There were on the Wayside Shrine: a full moon, a one, three houses, the first two of which are crossed out, and the third not, a comb with teeth, a snake or a viper, two dice with five on top, three crosses, each in a square, two of which are crossed out and one of which is not, a knife, two shoes, a rooster and the letter F."

"Quite so."

The old man nodded and took a thoughtful sip from his glass, "Now let's divide ourselves in the work. You, valiant squire, point out to me the rogue's signs up to the two fives of the dice, and then I will explain the rest of the drawings that have been on the Wayside Shrine since yesterday."

"We could leave the interpreting for later. Better to take precautions now -"

"Don't be concerned," he rebuffed. "It will be on my, the village mayor's cap, if something is missed, you are in no way to blame. And now off with your gypsy wisdom!"

"So listen," I began. "The signs are thus to read: On the first day of the full moon we gather. The target is for the third house in the village. This all means the moon, the one and the not crossed out third house. A comb with teeth indicates: a sharp dog is on guard. Then the snake means a lump of poison, to make the watch dog dumb."

"It's my house," nodded the white-haired man, "which they have in mind, and my Packan, who admittedly will not take a lump from a stranger's hand. You have interpreted well. Now it is my turn."

"Better let me."

"Chamber. Two fives on the dice: that is ten o'clock at night, because the moon is in front; three crosses, each in a square, two painted: get in at the third window. A knife: murders quickly and safely. The shoes: then make haste away with the loot, but first put the red rooster on the roof as it is shown, so that the fire will erase all the evidence. And F? What does that mean?"

He looked at me with a smile.

"That's a name sign," I replied quickly. "You can't get the name itself from it. Certainly it is the captain, whom the others obey."

"The F means Frieder," said the old man, "and this devil of a fellow is the leader of five journeymen murderers who have drawn themselves from the Spessart region and call themselves the Red Hat, as Frieder likes to wear a fox-red cap. Now you also know the name sign."

"A good guess," I admitted.

"Now I may trust you, young Herr."

The mayor extended his hand to me, which he had previously refused to do.

"Even though it stinks that you know how to read tines. You know that earlier I took you for one of their henchmen and spies, when you were at the wayside shrine and looked at the signs so devoutly. Hey, Hannes, Matz, and Kilian!" he shouted loudly.

In an instant the door opened, and three tree-strong fellows with rifles, sabers and two huge gray shepherds' or catchers' dogs came straight towards me with ropes in their hands.

"Leave the gentleman!" the mayor waved them off. "Go back to the others and tell them that this one is a righteous man and no one may harm him. Make it very clear, as I have shown you. Veit and Leberecht at the sloe bush, old Knolb and Heger's boy on the roof of the first house, four in the ditch, two behind the dung heap, ten in Heger's stable and the others, as the case may be. Let them come right on in, don't bother taking prisoners. The five helpers may kiss the snow, Frieder, the one with the red cap, we want alive."

The strong fellows looked at me and laughed.

"So we would have soon sent the wrong man on his way to heaven," said one of them, nudging the two others, who burst out with their boorish laughter. The dogs growled and pulled their chops from their white teeth.

"Now go again!" the old man instructed them, and immediately they stomped heavily out the door.

Outside the last light lay blue and darkening on the white land.

The old man ordered me not to leave the inn for the time being.

Later, the taciturn tavern maid, who answered all my questions with a "Don't know." brought me a chicken roasted on a spit and a jug of red wine.

Once, when I felt the urge to go out, one of the dogs struck close to me. So I had to stay and wait until everything was over, and tired from the long way and sleepy from eating and drinking, I fell into a half slumber.

A muffled shot woke me up, which was answered by a loud scream. A wild noise began, shots rang out, people shouted and screamed, cursing, wailing loudly and pleading in piteous tones. Muffled blows, which fell down, and stifled whining, plus the angry yipping and growling of dogs,

who had something between their teeth, startled me. I jumped up and wanted to go out the door. It was locked.

But soon the key turned in the lock and a small, gasping and excited boy of about eight years rushed in and stuttered:

"The mayor wants you to come!"

As I stepped out into the open, in the light of torches and lanterns, I saw the old man in the middle of a bunch of well-armed peasants and in front of him, cruelly tied up with ropes, a beardless frizzy head with a flat nose and powerful jaw bones.

"Step forward!" commanded the white-haired peasant and beckoned to me. "Well, Frieder, look at him. Do you know this man?"

He turned to the bound robber.

"How could I not know Dietlieb?" smirked the villain, glad to be able to exercise his malice on a blameless man, and thrust his chin at me. "He is the only one of my good journeymen, whom I sent on a scouting mission and who has not yet been massacred by you. You will have to die now, Dietlieb!"

A shudder ran through me at so much wickedness. A threatening murmur rose around me, gun barrels flashed, pointed at my chest. I wanted to speak, but a gesture of the mayor's hand commanded me and everyone else to silence. Nevertheless, one of them shouted out, that I should be struck down and not allowed to speak.

"Shut up, grocer!" the mayor thundered at him, and immediately there was a deep silence. He pointed at me.

"When did you go out on business?" he asked Frieder.

When did he join your gang?" he asked Frieder. "Can you swear that he was with you?"

"By the blood of St. Willibrord, he was there!" cried Frieder and looked at me with diabolic lust. "As we marched toward the village, after the clock struck nine, I sent him ahead with the lump for the dog."

"He's lying!" shouted one of the bunch. "The one with the lump of poison in a copper box lies behind the dunghill. Old Kolb has burned it down!"

"And I say it before God's throne: He was with and must now also go with me to the tower and then on to Master Hansen's dance floor," seethed Frieder.

I could not speak for horror.

"Enough!" the old man ordered Frieder. "Wicked, devilish, damned sinner, you who want to bring innocent blood to the gallows with you! Know that the gentleman has been sitting with me in the inn since the noon bell, and gave honest warning about the signs on the wayside shrine. So now follow your companions into eternal darkness!"

The robber laughed uproariously, and saliva ran down his chin.

"Only time will tell, you poisonous, teething, sheared peasant's knoll! I am deprived of the fun of the honest donkey, whom I have never seen, as a companion on the straw, so it is also just and my malice must remain without sugar. And now holla, you peasant steeds, lead me with proper reverence into your little cottage and deliver me tomorrow in the right way to the tower, if you don't mind the journey."

He added a laugh and neighed like a horse, to mock the country folk, who had listened to his insolent speech with their mouths open. Then, however, they looked expectantly at their chief.

The mayor stepped up to the prisoner like a black, looming shadow and said in a firm voice:

"Friederich Zabernikel, as you are called by your right name, we do not need a city court and no tower. You may say one Lord's Prayer and then you hang. This is your verdict."

Then Frieder let out a terrible roar, so that his eyeballs popped out of their sockets. He raced in his fetters, stamped in the snow and bent raging under the horny fists that held him. They waited quietly until he became still and gazed fearfully around him.

"You do not have the right of the sword, you may not deny anyone's life," he stammered. "Where is your tripod? Think well of what is right."

"We know," said the sheriff gravely, "bad deeds justify some things that are not written in the law of the land. Will you pray, Friederich, do it soon, for thy time is up."

"No need to pray, and no Lord God," cried the frightened one wildly. "If you want to murder without right, then murder. I have also helped many a one over! That were a plague in your coarse stomachs -"

"Shame!"

A heavy sooty blacksmith's hand moved threateningly in front of the man's pale face.

"Do you have another request?" asked the old man. Then Frieder laughed, almost merrily.

"Because Schinder-Susel has told me, that I would have to kick the air on an apple tree once and because I now have to do it after all, she shall be wrong. I want to do the last hop on a pear tree-"

"In Zeitler's garden," said one of them half aloud, and so the procession set off with crackling torches. Behind them ran the women and children. The firelight went red over the glittering snow. With weak knees I followed.

In a large orchard they threw the rope over a warty trunk, tied the noose and picked up the bound man.

"Pray - pray -" he gasped, then they let go.

Frieder distorted his face hideously and cackled:

"May Beelzebub hear me, that you bastards and your filthy brood may perish, shrivel up, and be swallowed up with leprosy, pestilence and -"

By then they had already put an end to his blasphemies. His feet twitched and kicked wildly in the air, flapping back and forth, until two boys tied them and hung on to them. When they let go, the legs stretched still from the body, on which the head with the red cap stood crooked and dark, through the thin line of the vine cord tied to the gnarled branch.

"You see it, Heiner," said one fellow to the other. "She's always right! This is an apple tree, and over there is the pear tree, which you wanted to point out to us."

"So Schinder-Susel, of whom we were told, can do more than cook mush," he laughed back. "Tomorrow in the first gray we'll scrape him and the others in."

"So, squire," spoke the mayor close beside me, "now come and sleep away the haunting. Tomorrow no soul will know any more of Frieder and his brotherhood, and for you it will be good to keep silent about what you have seen."

I merely nodded and walked beside him toward the inn. But then I suddenly stopped, grabbed the mayor by the arm, looked him in the face and said.

"How did you know how to interpret the signs on the statue?"

Bright light fell from the windows, singing and laughter sounded.

The man stopped and put his hand on my shoulder. His gaze sank deeply into mine.

"Friend," he said, and a bitter smile crossed his wrinkled face, "you have a right to ask that question. Well then - perhaps I have been through the same school as you yourself. Perhaps I have often put my ear to the mouth of a poor sinner who was lying on the rack, or once I slept with a poor sinner who blabbed at night what her red mouth concealed during the day. It also happens that an innocent person is put into chains and has to listen to what the gallows birds tell each other of tricks and intrigues. There you have plenty of food for thought about me. And if I put it right into your hands, written what I have learned as an old man in my younger years - that would not help you either.

Remember: One knows nothing of the other, and even if the other were his brother in the flesh. - Come, I will show you your berth."

At last, with the money I had found, I was once again dressed as a cavalier, I had reached home and stood before the gate, through which I as a boy had often gone in and out and through which my mother, my father's father and Aglaja had been carried away.

I stood and stared. What did the person who opened the door to me say?

-That the Baron of Dronte ate grapes for dessert the previous summer and was stung by a wasp and died a painful choking death from a swollen throat.

He had constantly demanded with gestures that he be cut with a penknife, where he pointed out the throat below the thrush but no one had dared to do this. So it had been inhuman to look at and to hear, how he, with his hands around himself and rolling his eyes terribly, rattled, strangled and whistled for several hours, until at last there were no more gasps or wild tossing and turning of the body, the soul was gone. But the house and farm had now become the property of the Lord of Zochte, but was not yet occupied. The Noble Foundation, to which everything fell, had agreed to the sale of the inheritance to Zochte.

The man did not know me, but thought I was a former guest of my father, and when I asked about the son Melchior, he shrugged his shoulders and said that the young gentleman after all kinds of bad pranks had fallen into the hands of the recruiters and was either buried somewhere in the ground or had decayed and evaporated. No one had heard of him.

I asked with anxious curiosity about Phoebus. He had remained as an imperial standard bearer squire. I received the answer that he had stayed in front of the enemy.

And who had arranged the legacy of the old Baron's estate? That was the Notary Mechelde, inside the city.

I turned my horse and rode slowly past everything, the wall with the roof tiles on top, which surrounded the park, the old trees, which rustled as before, the fish pond and the forester's house and saw from afar the arbor and cypresses of the cemetery.

The notary Mechelde welcomed me with stiff dignity in his gray room. Gray bundles of documents stood on the wall up to the smoky ceiling, and the whole rickety man was gray except for the green eyeshade from which he blinked. He pushed me a chair, checked my matriculation certificate, the only document I called my own, checked his books, and then he told me, that my father, resting in God, had left more than half of his fortune to noble foundations and orders of knighthood, a large amount to the purchase of an organ for the village church and furthermore- numerous legacies for the best of his dogs. Thus would remain for me, his only natural heir, an amount of about fifteen thousand thalers that I could receive from the court at any time.

At my request to see the testament he took a stained paper out of the cupboard and explained to me the sullied appearance of the writing with the fact that the old gentleman in *articulo mortis*, almost asphyxiating, had tried to find the passage in which of me as the "wayward" son Melchior, Baron von Dronte", was spoken of with the goose quill. But in the middle of a beginning, which the bloated hand was no longer able to perform, the shortness of breath set in so terribly that a sobbing spasmodic cough sprayed the expectoration on the paper and so spattered it with reddish spots.

During these explanations the notary drummed with his spidery fingers so impatiently on the lid of his desk, that I could see how little he cared for my company. But when, unconcerned about his lowly manner and politeness, I asked him to allow me to make occasional requests for my father's words about me (in which I hoped to find a sign of forgiveness and of paternal affection), the gray file clerk turned his inflamed eyes on me and said, with his left hand on the gold signet ring of his right hand and with a dry expression:

"I don't think it's my place to pass on confidential statements of my clients. However, if this is a special favor for you, Baron Dronte, I must tell you that your father adds words to every mention of your name, which I am neither willing nor called to repeat. In particular, the old man seemed to have doubts that existed in his mind as to whether his only son and name bearer was worthy to use the old coat of arms and title. And this feeling may have prevailed at his Grace's final decree, which entrusted me with the possession of this coat of arms on my right index, the signet ring of the deceased, which was located with the testament!

And he stretched out his scrawny, black-clawed finger towards me, on which sat the ring, in whose sardonyx our coat of arms with the three golden roses was artfully cut.

Involuntarily my hand clenched into a fist. The notary took a quick look at the colorful glass beads next to his desk and smiled with satisfaction.

I bowed briefly and headed for the door.

But before I had reached it, he hastily called me back and explained that he had forgotten. My Muhme, Aglaja's mother, had given me a sealed box at my father's death, which was in his safekeeping and which he would now give to me.

He rummaged and searched for a while under the lid of his desk, slipped me a piece of paper, and confirmation for signature and after I had put my name on the paper, he gave me a box covered with yellowed blue silk, which was sealed at the edge.

"And now the Herr Lord of Dronte will excuse me if I turn my attention to more urgent business."

I left the gray room, my chest constricted, and shaken by my father's harshness beyond death. It was not about the money. I did not mourn the fact that instead of a castle, rich fields, meadows, woods and ponds, instead of three prosperous villages along with many other possessions and goods, which had been sold to the rich Zochtes by the endowed foundations. What hurt me so bitterly was the fact that, of all the thousands of things that had belonged to my mother, not a single one of the familiar furniture and pictures, not a single piece had come to me. And if it were only the Dutch clock with the palm tree angel and the hammering little dead man or just my mother's silver bridal cup, or perhaps even the round egg made of seven

kinds of wood, on which she had stuffed my childhood stockings, I would have been full of satisfied melancholy.

So then, outcast and devoid of all love I took the long way back that I had ridden, and turned toward the cemetery. Green, tender leaves sprouted from the trees that lined the road, and my spurs brushed against the first flowers along the roadside. Larks rose warbling and disappeared in the bright blue. The day was so beautiful, and darkness wafted within me!

When I entered the quiet garden of the eternally resting in order to pay my respects and say goodbye forever to the dead man, who had not found a word of kindness for me and yet had called himself my father, I was struck by the memory of the nasty experience with that young maid, whose outcry and indignation had caused me to be horrified by the arbitrariness and crudeness of the powerful, to which I too was to belong. The subsequent disgust of that night was so strong that I wanted to turn back, in order not to enter the earth, under which the dead man lay. But after a short inner struggle, I nevertheless went on, probably because I knew that nothing would ever cause me to return to the places of my unfortunate youth.

So I walked with my hat pulled off between the iron crosses, urns and stone angels. The sky, which had been so blue just a moment before, had turned gray with quickly rising clouds, and the thousand fold song of the birds in the trees suddenly fell silent. Wind showers ran over the hills and made the light, long grass bend. A single ray of sunlight fell narrow and golden on a square stone next to the path, on which was written a half-blurred, barely legible name and a saying. This saying was hit by the ray of light, so that I could see the damaged letters clearly and interpret them: *Non omnis moriar!* "I will not die completely." These words immediately sank to the bottom of my soul, and an unspeakable consolation emanated from it, which filled my eyes with tears of joy and my heart with a sweet, indefinite hope. These words of the Roman poet was also well known to me from the history lessons. The Englishman Herr Thomas More had spoken it before his head fell under the axe of the executioner. Strange that only today the day had come when I sensed and shuddered at the immense significance of the saying.

But the ray of sunlight faded, and the dull gray of the coming spring rain brought me to my senses. I stamped my foot, and the clink of the spur woke me from dreams that threatened to be lost in infinity. I continued walking until I reached the heir-funeral, behind whose heavy, rust-stained

doors, besides my hard father, my mother, my grandfather, my Muhme, and my beloved Aglaja, slept, and I looked at the rose tree that Muhme had planted here a few days after the girl's death. It had grown into a stately trunk, and its branches were covered with tiny, delicate green leaves. In the summertime it would glow with red roses. -

"I would gladly have carried a rose from your grave with me forever, Aglaja," I said softly and stroked the little tree. I thought that the fine ends of the roots might have found their way down to her and that she would feel it when a loving hand touched the smooth trunk. But then I was so frightened that I would have cried out loudly for the little one in the solemn silence of the cemetery.

To my right hand, next to a freshly dug, still unlabeled grave, squatted on a half sunken mossy stone slab one whom I had never forgotten and whose hideous demeanor and appearance often haunted me in waking dreams.

He still wore the broad hat, had the nail-studded hunting satchel and stabbed at me cheeky and mocking with his yellow goat eyes, the hooked nose bent like a vulture's beak and the wrinkled mouth warts contorted.

"It's me again," he croaked. "Hasn't been long, Your Grace, that I have had the pleasure of seeing you."

I did not answer. In my coat pocket I had a well-loaded derringer, the handle of which nestled in my hand.

"Yes, yes," chuckled the fellow, making a face, "It is Fangerle, your grace Lord Baron. I was with them as they hanged Friederich Zabernikel, but kept myself nicely in the background."

He burst out into a bleating laugh, and his eyes glimmered in the shadow of the hat brim.

"What are you looking for here?" I burst out.

He laughed again, and it sounded like the clink of glass panes. With his yellow hand he pointed to the open pit at my side, from which the grave digger's spade had been spilling sand, earthy bones and a brownish skull, to which hair still stuck, and hissed:

"A new one, Baron, and here I wait for the soul mouse."

At this he tapped on his satchel, at which there was inside a shrill, piteous whistle.

"Let me be content with your nonsense," I cried, seized with horror. A cold raindrop struck me in the face so that I flinched.

Then he twisted his face into a terrible grimace, his eyes glittered, opened his gaping mouth and mimicked that ghastly scream that Heiner Fessl made in his fear of death in front of the Rabenstein.

"J-i-i-ii!"

"Dog!" I roared, tore the derringer out of my pocket, cocked it in a flash with my thumb, thrust the barrel into his wrinkled face and shot *à bout portant*. In the blue cloud of smoke I saw nothing, and when it disappeared, only slowly, in the dampness of the rain, the coat of the guy fluttered already far away between the tombstones and bushes, from where an adverse, shrieking laughter rang out. And again it seemed to me, as if a large owl-like bird flew away between the trees and over the wall.

There was a loud calling and it came closer. Two gravediggers, an old man and a sturdy young fellow, came running with bludgeons and confronted me. What had happened here and why had I shot? I talked to them and described to them the guy with the satchel, who once before had been suspiciously at an unburied corpse in the past, and also at the execution of the blacksmith Fessl in a tree and with his new corpse-desecrating behavior, had now put me in such a rage that I fired my pistol at him, but apparently did him no harm, after he had laughed, escaped and flitted away.

They listened to me calmly and seriously, and the old man nodded his head as if to indicate that the man was well known to him, and that he, like me hated him to his very soul.

Then he asked me my name, and when I told him, he said:

"The Baron may now do as he pleases. We have the vested right to punish offenses against the sanctity of the place on the spot, or to punish the offence if the penalties are not paid to the court. For shooting on consecrated ground, a man shall pay only one silver thaler."

I threw the man two thalers. But he gave one of them back to me and said:

"I am not allowed to take excess money. It is only a pity that your shot will never been able to harm him. -"

"What do you mean? Is he frozen?" I asked.

The boy laughed, and the old man shrugged:

"If the gentleman has not buried a cross in his bullet mold, as it should never be lacking and thus imprints itself on the leaden birdie, then he has not even hurt him, however powerful the weapon may otherwise be."

"I do not carry a cross on the bullets."

"So it's a pity about the shot and about the penalty for it."

The old man cradled the hairless head back and forth.

"But the fact that the Lord can see him is significant."

"Why?"

"Not everyone can see him, only the blessed." the younger man interjected. "Like, for example, father here, who has often shooed him from fresh graves, and I would give anything if I could ever catch sight of him. But I am days and nights in vain and have not seen him. And yet he has been there."

"Who is that fellow?" asked I fiercely.

"Fangerle," said the old man, making a cross.

"Is it a man or is it-?"

But they gave me no more answer and looked toward the entrance in the quietly falling rain. From there, with singing and many-voiced prayer came a funeral procession.

"I always thought that he would show himself at the graves of the miserly," the old man muttered and climbed into the pit. They did not pay any further attention to me, and when I asked again, the boy said gruffly, "It is better for the Lord to pray!"

Confused and saddened in my soul, I walked away along the side paths to reach the exit, while the coffin of the miser was swaying towards the open pit.

Before the post coach left, I noticed the faded and sealed box that the notary had given me as an inheritance from my Muhme, Aglaja's mother. I tore off the lacquer seal and lifted the lid. On the white, yellowed silk rested a red-gold curl of my unforgettable, beloved cousin and her silver finger ring, which I had often seen on her small child's hand. It was formed with the finest art from two slants which wound around a round-cut fire opal. I pressed countless kisses on the mysteriously shining and iridescent stone, on the silvery, scaly adder's liver, which had once held a finger of the sweetest hand, and called out the name that had been cut into my heart and painfully scarred there.

But on the evening of the day I arrived in the great city of Vienna and marveled at the life in the streets, the many carriages, the many carts, and sedan chairs, adventures of such a peculiar kind happened to me that I thought of the influence on my life of dark and sinister powers.

The first thing I encountered was of course of noble origin and graceful species. When I walked across the square on which St. Stephen's Cathedral stretches its stone carving into the sky, I was caught in a crowd of carriages and sedan chairs, and was so close to a very distinguished, finely painted sedan chair with two dark red liveried porters, that I had to stand close to the lowered side window eye to eye with the occupant. But who can describe the astonishment I felt when I recognized in the highly toupeed, nobly dressed lady, Sattler Höllbrich's Lorle? She too knew me again immediately, for she uttered a slight cry and called my name.

With my hat drawn, I remained, enraptured by her unimaginable, fully blossomed beauty, enhanced by small arts, and asked in quiet, urgent pleading words for an early reunion. She pointed with a short, openly fearful movement towards the dark red carriers and then said very loudly, "Well, Doctor, you can bring the new ointment for my complexion to my house. Just ask for Madame Laurette Triquet in Schönlatern Street."

With that she nodded at me pathetically, in fact condescendingly, and gave the porters a sign to go on.

After an exquisite dinner, I left my room in the evening and went to Himmelpfort Street quarter again and thought to mingle a little with the evening walkers who were glad of the pleasant breeze after the hot day. Already for some time I thought I had noticed an extremely graceful and neatly dressed young lad following after me at every turn. And really, it did not take long, and then he was beside me and said half aloud:

"If you desire exceptionally good and amusing company and would like to play a game, I would be prepared to take the gentleman to a house where you can find such things of the best quality."

Gladly willing to spend my evening hours in a pleasant way, and hoping to increase my money supply I agreed to follow the man. He modestly went ahead as a guide, only looking back from time to time to see if I was behind him. After a long back and forth through dark, poorly lit and bumpy streets, we finally reached a crooked and very narrow alley. In front of a large gate, the young man stopped and made four quick knocks with the knocker, followed by two stronger ones. We had to wait a while and I

noticed how a dark eye looked at us through a crack in the most precise way. Then, however, in the large gate, which was covered with heavy iron plates, a small door was opened, in which an older, cunning looking woman appeared and looked at us with a burning candle for quite a long time. Only when my guide quietly whispered something that seemed to me to be a word of recognition or a password, the woman stepped back so that we could pass her. We walked over a large, damp, ivy-covered courtyard, in which water poured from a triton's mouth, and then climbed a steep, barely lit spiral staircase.

On the second floor, my apparently disinterested guide asked to be let in the same way as downstairs, and when the servant opened the double doors to let me enter, I stood for a moment as if dazzled in the brightness, the hundreds of fragrant wax candles spread. A gold dressed lackey took our swords, hats and cloaks from us and told us to go on.

I saw at once that the ugly, dilapidated outer appearance of the isolated house, the unpleasant darkness on the stairs and in the courtyard were only intended to keep away the curious, and the lavish furnishings and the abundance of light into concealment. For here the walls sparkled with gold, magnificent tapestries partially concealed the scarlet silk wallpapers, the floor was bare and smooth as glass, hundreds of candles burned in Venetian prismatic chandeliers and silver chandeliers. On tables with priceless plates of Malachite, lapis lazuli and ruin marble stood the most exquisite delicacies and drinks.

"The Baron of Dronte might like to go to the playroom," said my pale guide with a smile.

"How do you know me?" I asked not very friendly.

The young man smiled superiorly.

"We take an interest in all strangers of distinction who arrive, and are informed by the Stagecoach drivers in good time. Thus I know that the Baron has taken lodgment with the widow Schwebs- kühlein, and I made it my business to introduce the Baron to a certainly agreeable circle, in which equally chivalrous amusement, as well as something from Fortuna's horn of plenty."

During this speech we stepped into brightly lit, magnificent adjoining rooms, in which Pharaoh and Landsknecht were being played at several tables. The players hardly turned their heads toward me, when my name was shouted loudly, because at the largest of the tables, where I was

standing at, all eyes were fixed on the Bankholder, who was putting on his apron. Muffled exclamations rang out from everywhere like "*Va tout!*" or "*Va banque!*" and the soft clinking and rolling of the *louisdors* on the green cloth that was stretched over the stone slabs of the tables.

I reached for the money cat, which I was wearing under my vest as a precaution against thieves, and approached the large table. Immediately the young man, who had brought me here, offered me a comfortable armchair and then disappeared, when I sat down with a light greeting. Before I began to play, I looked at the people with whom I was dealing, and found that I had stumbled into a gathering of distorted images. The bankholder had a colorless, pinched face, which had been devastated by a restless and wild life. He wore over the right sunken eye a black cloth patch, a square piece of cloth on a ribbon, which crossed the forehead and ran further behind the right ear. Next to him sat a tremendously obese, heavy-breathing woman with a white powdered pumpkin head, fanning her pressed-up bosom. She was tastelessly covered with pearls and jewels of all kinds and seemed to me to be a Spanish Jewess, judging by her facial features. Enthroned beside her, upright and haughty under half-closed lids, a very skinny woman of standing, whose yellow monkey face had been plastered with beautiful patches in the form of palms, butterflies and little birds. Her bloodless fingers rummaged greedily in a whole pile of gold pieces that lay in front of her. On the other side of the bankholder an old man leaned low in the chair with almost extinguished eyes, whose long fingers crawled like spider legs out of the lace cuffs when it was necessary to reach for gold. A daunting, ugly, hunchbacked person with a deep brown face, finger-thick, coal-black eyebrows and sharp, thin lips ate sweets from a gold paper bag, and the pungent smell of bitter almonds, which I had already noticed when I entered the room. Between him and a dark green, silver-laced hussar with hairy hands shyly sat a young girl all huddled together, who immediately attracted my attention. Nevertheless my glance also took in as well a man in expensive clothes, whose nose consisted of fiery red turkey flaps and a high official, judging from his embroidered jacket, who turned a blue-white, blind horse's eye toward me. All the people at that gaming table were somehow marked in some way.

But the young girl, whose completely unexpected charm so deeply touched me, had an indescribable resemblance to my Aglaja, my dead cousin, was of perfect grace and beauty and looked like a wonderful flower

in a heap of rubbish. She looked at me with a pleading and help-seeking look, as it were that penetrated my heart like sweet fire, and in a moment filled it with fierce tenderness.

It was as if Aglaja were sitting opposite me in a slightly changed form, with a silent plea for protection and salvation from some danger. Soon I heard her name, which the hunchback pronounced in a strange German and always in a harsh commanding tone:

"Zephyrine."

And every time the monster spoke of some service from the fair and lonely child, the toothless mouth of the spider-fingered old man, whom they called Count Korony, lit up with an unspeakably repugnant and lascivious grin. I immediately made up my mind to approach this girl, who I loved at first sight and to offer her my services, of which she seemed to need. This feeling became so violent in me, that I could hardly control myself and several times I was tempted to approach her, especially when her gray, gold-flecked eyes looked at me and I could see Aglaja's unforgettable stars directed at me.

Nevertheless, I was wise enough not to admit a completely incomprehensible affection and to wait for a favorable moment, which would allow the inconspicuous beginning of a conversation.

Meanwhile, the game was played very high, and the bankholder with the hooded eye raked in whole mountains of gold. Apart from him, the feisty Spanish Jewess was in luck. At first I played well and doubled twice, but I lost on the very next play. And little by little I got into a heat, tried to quickly bring back what I had lost and again and again repeatedly lost. The girl's gaze clung sadly to me, and once it was as if she reminded me with an almost imperceptible wink of her eye to be careful and to keep an eye on the bankholder. I had to reach deeper and deeper into my money cat, more and more of my gold pieces went into the hands of the bankholder and the fat woman, and as midnight approached, I realized with a nameless horror that my cash was exhausted and only a few gold pieces were my own.

Bitter remorse seized me for my imprudence. Too late I thought of the fact that such secret playhouses were only set up for the catching of bullfinches, and I remembered how often I had heard that the apparent opposing players after the departure of the plundered divided the profit that had been taken from their victim. This was thanks to the skilful way in which they worked together.

But as much as I was on my guard after Zephyrine's secret hint and looked at the bankholder's hands, I could find little wrong that would have given me the right to declare the game invalid and demand the lost money back. But even then my rebellion would have been in vain and ridiculous because these numerous people were prepared for such things. I didn't even know where this house was located and would never be able to find it the next day!

In despair, I bet two of my four remaining gold pieces, when the clock on the mantelpiece of the fireplace struck midnight and played a hoarse, mournful gavotte.

At that moment the double door was opened, and a strange, hollow-eyed man, dressed entirely in black mourning livery pushed a new player in a wheelchair to the table. It was an ancient, quite frail old man with a white wig, just like the servant, only more expensively dressed in black. His face betrayed great wisdom, but also an eventful life. For it was crisscrossed by countless wrinkles and furrows. But the waxy color and the strange immobility of the wrinkles gave this well-educated head of a witty old man something eerily corpse-like and dead. Uncertain memories penetrated agonizingly on me.

Unconcerned about the poorly concealed astonishment of the table company, the old man slid a roll of money onto the cloth and immediately joined in the game without speaking a word. Whispering, everyone looked at him. It seemed to me that the candles had been burning darker since he had come into the hall with his servant.

Then the man in the wheelchair turned two black, lusterless eyes on me and said with a voice that seemed to come from unfathomable depths:

"Herr von Dronte, I invite you to play with me *en compagnie!*"

I only managed to nod. Like mist it sank on Zephyrine's lovely face, on her shimmering hair, on the ring-laden hands of the Spanish Jewess and the nimble fingers of the bankholder.

The cards fell.

Silently, the old man slipped me half of his winnings, a whole roll of golden sovereigns.

The bankholder mumbled something between his teeth, the fat woman was wiping sweat and grease powder from her forehead, and the hussar uttered a half-loud Hungarian curse. Again the cards fell, thin old

man's fingers pushed new gold pieces to me. The time passed, fell in golden drops down on me. I saw that people from the other tables stood up, that a ring of curious faces surrounded us. But all were silent. Only the quiet fall of cards, the few words necessary for the game and the metallic, fine clink were heard. Soon I could no longer put both hands around the gold treasure in front of me. I began stealthily to fill my money cat. When it was full to bursting I stuffed the ducats into my pockets.

Already I had three times more money than I had possessed when I entered this house. The coattails hung down heavily, the vest bulged at the pockets. Everyone lost - the man with the horse eye, the fat Jewess, the bankholder, the hussar, the red-nosed one, the courtly one, the count, the hunchback next to Zephyrine. With trembling hands they rummaged in pockets and bags, their faces shone with sweat, the spit shine of the brows melted into sooty blackness, their eyes gawked --.

I was rich. I could not even accommodate any more gold. Then the clock on the fireplace gave the single stroke of the hour after midnight and began to play the out-of-tune gavotte. Immediately the black servant grabbed the chair, and the old man, looking frail and suffering, nodded to me with a faint smile, and the wheelchair passed soundlessly through the open door through which it had entered an hour ago.

I jumped up and hurried out of the completely frozen group of people around the table to express my thanks to him. No one hindered me. I still felt how an ice-cold, small, trembling hand sought mine, and I clenched my fingers around a folded piece of paper, which she pushed toward me. I ran as fast as I could into the anteroom. Where was the man in the wheelchair?

A sleepy servant handed me my coat, hat and sword. I gave him a few gold foxes and hurried down the stairs. The old woman stood at the gate as if she had just let someone out. She opened the door indifferently. While walking I heard the raging, shouting and wild curses in the rooms upstairs. But I had no time; I had to thank my rescuer.

But the street was empty. Nowhere a trace of the old man. I ran into side alleys. Nothing. Nowhere a sound. How had he disappeared so quickly?

Then - suddenly - I saw with terrible, indescribable clarity, like a picture on a dark background, the chapel with the dead man before me, from whose defenseless hand I was supposed to take a cross - for Fangerle, the desecrator of the corpse.

Half fainting, I leaned against a wall, and I almost fell from fright, as the hinges of the lantern over me shrieked in the wind.

I still held Zephyrine's note in my cramped hand, I unfolded it and read:

"Save me!"

In my great desire to protect Zephyrine from a danger unknown to me, but of which she was well aware, I remembered my childhood friend Lorle, with whom I had met on the day of my arrival in Vienna in such an unusual way. As strong as my nostalgia for her body had been, the acquaintance with a being who reminded me in the deepest way of Aglaja, had been enough to cool my desires with regard to the beautiful Laurette Triquet, as she now called herself, and her sensual embers. But no one could be of better help to me, in my hitherto futile effort to find this beloved girl and her hunchbacked guardian than that clever girl and, judging from her rise, she was in possession of valuable relations.

In Schönlatern Street, I was directed to an old house, which, similar to that gambling house, from the outside didn't show any of the comfort and beauty of its furnishings. A magnificent marble group, the robbery of Proserpina, stood at the foot of the stone stairs I was climbing, and Venetian Moorish boys, painted in gold and colors, stood in their wooden immobility on their heels, holding up lanterns.

The cute chambermaid, who, with coquettish skirts walked in front of me up the stairs, opened the door to a pale yellow silk room for me, then disappeared with an apology through the heavy curtain held by cupids, behind which there was a small door. At the opening of this I briefly heard a shrieking laughter, which filled me with astonishment, since I had never met a person with such a hideously piercing voice. I looked around the distinguished room in which I was kept waiting, and looked closely at the only picture, a man with olive-brown, finely chiseled features, dark, sad eyes, of rather unattractive facial formation, wearing a canary yellow uniform with red lapels and under the coat, which was open, a black breastplate. Then the maid reappeared, lifted the curtain and asked me to enter with a curtsy.

I entered a boudoir entirely in gleaming gold with precious furniture and a brocade-covered resting bed, on which Laurette half sat, half lay. She smilingly held her hand out to me from a cloud of lace and thin silk, smiling, and I was again struck anew by the unusual charm that her pretty,

rosy face radiated under the artful coiffure. But while I stared at her, not at all to her displeasure, enraptured, that disgusting, shrill laughter sounded close to us, and only then I noticed a chubby, bald-headed parrot of gray color, from whose crooked beak came the laughter.

If my whole mind had not been filled with the image of that sweet child's face and the reddish-gold hair, I would hardly have felt at ease in the presence of this blossomed woman, who had stirred my first emotions of love. I felt that I could not have restrained myself for long, and all the more so because Laurette, with consummate art, soon showed me a part of her perfectly beautiful breast, soon the noble shape of a leg or the curve of her classic arm. Nevertheless, I could not resist the desire to remind the distinguished lady of those days, when she was still called Lorle and had kissed me in the honeysuckle arbor behind her father's house. But she slipped away from me in a playful mastery of the conversation, and thus forced me to respect the boundaries she wished to keep. Yes, when I, fired by my blissful memories, dared to touch her bare arm with my hand, she struck me on my fingers and pointed with peculiar, even serious, significance at the parrot, who was entertaining himself by wiping his beak on the silver perch.

"Take care, my all too friendly cavalier, beware of this bird," she said softly, as if she were afraid that the ruffled beast might be listening. "Apollonius does not like it when one caresses me in his presence. Besides, my little finger tells me, dear Baron, that you have not come to court me, but that you have called on my willingness to serve you in some other way."

"I cannot deny it," I replied, somewhat affected, although it seems unclear to me from where you, my dear Laurette, have received such wisdom."

"Ei!" she laughed, "Don't I have my soothsayer and at the same time protector and guardian next to me?" and less loudly she added:

"It can be called a true good fortune, that the good Apollonius is becoming somewhat hard of hearing and is no longer able to overhear all that is spoken."

The fact that she lowered her voice seemed indeed to disgust the bird. He rolled his ball-eyes, stepped from one foot to the other, and struck the cage bar with his beak, so that it rang.

"Louder!" he cried.

"You see?" said Laurette, glancing shyly at him. "He's in a bad mood today."

"He looks like an old Hebrew, your Apollonius," I said aloud. "It is believed that animals of his species live to be over a hundred years old."

"Hihihi! Hehehe! I'm an animal?" cried the bird. "A hundred years! Imbecile!"

"What do you mean, he speaks French?" I turned to the beautiful one.

"He speaks all languages," whispered Laurette.

"Take care! He guards me, tells everything to the Spanish envoy - whose mistress I am," she added hesitantly, her cheeks flushing slightly. "But Apollonius also bears witness to events and is able to see into the future."

Now I knew who the pimp was to whom she owed her well-being, and so naturally a faint feeling of jealousy would have arisen at this discovery. Not being of a jealous nature, I felt nothing of the kind. Nevertheless, I felt sadness and remorse that this once pure and benign child through my fault had been taken from the peaceful and safe shelter of her parents' home to the glittering and uncertain splendor of a life based only on lust.

At the same time, however, I clearly recognized that her restraint towards me was not due to gratitude towards a present friend and lover, but rather the fear of the treacherous gossip of the feathered fowl to which she obviously attributed intellect and human-like malice.

That through such thoughts the extremely ugly, bald-headed animal became even more repugnant and hated by me than already at the first sight, is understandable. I was tempted to interact with the chattering bird. Or at least to check in every way, to what extent Laurette's description about his intelligence was justified. How could this small, round bird's head, behind these rigid, rolling eyes be anything different from that of other animals?

The repeating and coincidentally making sense of learned words and randomly putting together learned words might be suitable to cause strange, astonishing effects. But I could not and did not believe in a human-like thinking ability. The only thing I understood was Laurette's caution to speak softly, so that the hard-of-hearing bird would not parrot them back at inopportune times. I myself had heard a story, in which a starling, also a talking animal, had betrayed his mistress by singing in front of her husband in the most melting tones the first name of a young gentleman, who had

been suspected for a long time of being the favored lover of the housewife. Without waiting for Laurette's warm gesture, I turned to the parrot, looked at him and said:

"Well, Apollonius, if you are really so clever as you are, tell me who won the most money the day before yesterday at the Pharaoh's?"

The bird ruffled its feathers, twisted its eyeballs in a ghastly way, chuckled a few times, and then cackled:

"Defunctus" - the dead one. I looked at him, unable to speak a word.

"I beg you, Melchior, let him go," said Laurette quickly and quietly, and in her gaze there was fear. Then she said loudly, "Baron, don't tease Apollonius, or he'll tell me the nastiest things that deprive me of sleep at night.

"It was I who won, infernal beast!" I cried, and pulled myself together.

The gray one laughed and said with his head bent forward, eyeing me maliciously:

"Donum grati defunctil"-a gift from the grateful dead.

"Why don't you turn the collar on such vicious vermin?" I angrily prodded. "Give him some peach pits and get some peace with it."

She shook her head.

"He eats no poison, fair Herr! Little killer! Little murderer!" chuckled Apollonius and flapped his wings.

"Perhaps you have murdered yourself, chewy, disgraceful beast!" I screamed and shook my fist at him. "Perhaps you are a soul damned by God and must now repent in the form of an animal!"

There came a heavy, almost human sigh from the bar, a groan from a tortured chest. The parrot looked at me with a fearful and horribly desolate look, and hung its head. Slowly he pulled the nictitating skin over his eyes, and with an inner tremor I looked - by God in heaven! -, I saw two tears dripped from the eyes of the animal. But this lasted only a moment, because immediately after that he stared at me with such appalling insolence that I became hot and cold and my rising of pity quickly disappeared. But when I saw the troubled face of the beautiful Laurette, I thought how naughty and disturbing for her peace my behavior must have seemed to her, and to rectify my mistake, I decided to turn the matter into a joke. I bowed therefore with ironic politeness before the animal and said in a cheerful tone:

"Do not be angry with me, venerable Apollonius, I did not mean to offend your wisdom. I am now converted and no longer doubt in your wonderful gift to see the past and the future. Would it not be possible to make friends with you, king of all parrots?"

The feathered one shook with laughter, clucked his beak and whistled. Then he moved his head quite distinctly, after human style, violently denying, back and forth.

"So we can't be friends?" I continued and winked at Laurette. "I would have liked to ask a question - about a hunchback I'm looking for -."

My question was for Laurette, of course, and I was about to explain myself further, when it came buzzing from the bar:

"Dottore Postremo."

"What do you want with him?" said Laurette, in astonishment.

"Do you know him?" I asked, unable to conceal my excitement. A deep blush passed over her face.

"As it happens --" she replied sheepishly.

"What is it about him?"

"He's an Italian doctor -- a lot of women go to see him who wish to remove the unpleasant consequences of a few pleasant hours. He has a reputation, and the courts have often dealt with him. But nothing could ever be proved. - But you must not think, Baron, that I might -"

I laughed politely, "How could I, beautiful Laurette?"

"He is said, by the way, to have a very beautiful foster-daughter or niece," she went on, looking at me lurkingly. "A girl who has hardly blossomed. He lives in the house called Zum Fassel."

She lowered her eyes and looked at me from under her lids.

"Be careful! The man is capable of anything!"

"You are mistaken, Laurette," I lied. "It's not a question of adventures."

The accursed bird intervened with a wild laughter between them.

"Apollonius sees through you."

Laurette let out a small reproachful sigh.

"You've always been a lover of youth and innocence, Baron Dronte."

"That remark touches something in me that is unforgettable and valuable enough to shine like a bright star for my entire life."

"Oh - you are gallant!" She offered me her hand to kiss, and stood up, excited and glowing, as it seemed to me.

I rose and resolved to leave her now- constrained by conflicting and peace less feelings.

"How will I fare?" I addressed the bird once again. "Since I did not succeed in winning your friendship -?"

"Off with his head! Off with his head!" the beast screamed shrilly and looked at me with devilish joy.

I paid no more attention to the parrot and left.

Laurette accompanied me to the yellow room. The curtain had hardly been drawn when I perceived a sudden pallor in her, and just in time I was able to save her from falling by taking her in my arms. I laid her quickly on a small sofa and looked around. On a table stood a golden flask. I pulled the stopper and rubbed the strongly scented essence on her temples. She slowly opened her eyes.

"The abominable one frightened me so", she flirted and wrapped her arms around my neck.

Gently, I pulled free.

"I am a captive," she lamented softly, "the satanic beast guards me better than humans have been able to do. Do you hear how it screams and beats with its wings? That is the signal for the paid maid to come in and look after me. But she is not here, I sent her to him with a note -- we are alone -."

Again her soft arms wrapped around my neck, and before I knew it her hot red lips were sucking at my mouth.

Lorle-poor Lorle-, I thought, and then the most burning longing for Zephyrine, whom I hoped to find in the hunchbacked doctor's house.

Tenderly I loosened her arms and looked into her eyes:

"Forget me, Lorle," I admonished softly. "Don't put your happiness at risk for the sake of a fleeting minute."

A flame flashed in her eyes.

"I thank you for your concern for me," she said harshly. "Now I know that you love another. And that I am nothing to you anymore!"

"Lorle -!" I stammered.

"Go! Go!" she said, and tears stood in her eyes. "Why are you trying to lie?"

Then I walked slowly through the yellow room and closed the door between me and the sobbing woman.

I passionately pursued my research. The house "Zum Fassel" was soon found, but it seemed foolish to enter Doctor Postremo's apartment under any pretext. I certainly would not have succeeded in entering his mansion with the fair Zephyrine in his presence, and even if this could have happened by chance, not a word between us would have remained unheard. That the doctor must have had a bad memory of me from the gambling house was another factor.

It was therefore necessary to find a time in which either the doctor was away from home and the niece was in the apartment, or hope for the luck to see Zephyrine on one of her exits.

But although I spent all my time on such scouting, and opened the door of the spacious house, which was inhabited by many people, neither the one nor the other opportunity presented itself.

Then something happened to me, which newly shook me and tormented me with puzzling questions and, strange as it sounds, at the same time filled me with confidence.

I was walking through the nearby Greeks alley, to take a quick meal in an inn. Groups of Greek and Turkish merchants were plying their business on the street, according to the custom of the Orient transplanted here, and it sometimes took patience to get through the obstacle of those eagerly talking and absorbed in their trade. Just now I was about to look for a way through such a crowd of people, when I saw an apparition at the end of the narrow alley, which put me in great excitement. A man with a black turban, his bright eyes fixed on me, and seemed to want to meet me. I saw clearly his pure features, the amber necklace around his neck, the reddish-brown robe. This time I had to get close to him. I forcefully made my way through the astonished merchants, and I had to take my eyes off the man in the robe for only a second and when I looked in that direction again, he had disappeared, as he had every time I was close to reaching him. I hurried as fast as I could to the exit of the narrow alley, but it was in vain. Neither to the right nor to the left, my eyes saw nothing but indifferent people who slowly or quickly made their way. Desperate and with the feeling that the sight of the unusual man meant something important and decisive, which must be imminent, I came up with the idea of the Levant merchants who had just been pushed aside, in the hope that a person living in Vienna, who walked along in oriental costume, must be known to them.

So I went back the way I came and spoke to an old Turk with a good-natured face and a long white beard, who, despite the warmth, was wearing a precious coat, trimmed with sable fur, and seemed to be very respectable, judging by the behavior of the bystanders.

With polite words, I asked him to forgive me for the nuisance, and immediately added my inquiry about the man who had disappeared from me. The Turk touched his forehead and mouth with his right hand and replied to me in fairly good German exceedingly politely that he did not know this man and that he had never seen him. At the same time his eyes were fixed with a strange expression on the small red scar, which I owed to the fall of broken glass, when I, still a child, escaped the collapsing ceiling of my room, and said with a peculiar expression of reverence:

"You, Lord, who bear the mark of Ewli, ask questions of me?"

I did not understand what he meant, and described the turban and the robe of the stranger.

"It is the clothing of the Halveti dervishes", said the Turk, bowing to me. "Grant me your goodwill, Effendi!"

He stepped back, and I saw the others pestering him with questions, to which he answered quietly. What he said seemed to have been about me, because when I passed through the crowd once more, they all bowed to me and voluntarily formed a kind of trellis, through which I strode half ashamedly.

I took a simple meal in a restaurant with uneasy feelings and thoughts of the stranger, whom I could not approach. Then I wanted to return to my post opposite the house "Zum Fassel". On the way I passed by the Greek coffeehouse and involuntarily took a quick glance through the windows.

There I saw to my joyful astonishment the hunchbacked figure of Doctor Postremo. He was sitting bent over a Backgammon board, on which the stones were jumbled, and talked with waving hands to a mockingly smiling, black-haired and yellow-skinned man with long, crooked nose, whose behavior had obviously infuriated him. I stopped and noticed that the stones were immediately again in position and a new game began.

Thus the house had still another exit, which had escaped my attention and which the Italian used.

Now or never I had to dare. I quickly entered the building and asked the first person who met me on the dark stairs, for the doctor's apartment. Sullenly I was given the information that it was located on the second floor.

I effortlessly found the door with the name and a bell pull, with the figure of a yellow hand pointing to it.

Just as I reached out my fingers for it, a shadowy gray woman came scurrying up the stairs, slipped past me and inserted a key into the door lock. When she entered and looked at me questioningly, I quickly pushed past her and said:

"Don't be alarmed, good woman. I must speak to the Demoiselle Zephyrine at once -."

At the same time I pressed a prepared number of imperial ducats into her withered hand.

That seemed to do the trick. The ugly hag grinned and pulled me through a gloomy corridor into a half-dark chamber, which, like the whole apartment was filled with the smell of bitter almonds.

"Wait here!" she hissed and scurried out.

Not without uneasiness and expecting an ambush I let my eyes wander around the eerie room. In one corner stood two human, gruesomely bent over skeletons, where one could see that the curved spine and the arched shoulder blades during life had formed a hunchback, like the one Postremo himself had on his back. Perhaps he had wanted to study his own mutated limb structure.

On a rack, whose green curtain was only half drawn, blue, brown and yellowish organs floated in large glass vessels in clear liquid. A dried brain lay like the core of a giant nut on a table, whose top was formed from some type of polished rock that was unknown to me. Gray, greenish blue and rose-colored snake-like figures with white angular spots in them and dark red, sharply bordered sections - was this colored marble?

I ran my fingers over the greasy, egg-round slab and suddenly realized with disgust that here was the smoothed cut surface of a fossilized corpse before me, as they knew how to make in Bologna. In a glass box at the window sat a completely twisted, misshapen chameleon, which I at first thought was dead, until it slowly turned its protruding eye on me and turned its gray color into a dirty red.

Then a curtain rustled in the background. A white figure stood motionless, with half-closed eyes.

"Zephyrine!"

I enfolded her in my arms, and sung a thousand tender words into her little ear, drank in the heady scent of her hair and covered her white face

with kisses.

"I won't leave you -- again," I affirmed, drunk with happiness.

"I knew you would come," she whispered softly.

She clung to my shoulders with her small hands and repeated the words that she had scribbled in a flying hurry on the piece of paper I had taken from the gambling house.

"Save me! Save me! Take me with you!"

This unexpected and scarcely hoped for turn of my adventure filled me with the deepest delight. I was immediately ready to do anything she might ask.

"So you are in danger?" I asked.

She quickly nodded her head several times and once again nestled her tender body against me again pleadingly. For a short moment I thought of the severe punishments with which the Empress' courts used to deal with kidnapers. It had been said that a nobleman who had kidnapped the wife of a distinguished courtier and special favorite and fled with her to his estate, was seized and taken to the dungeons of Spielberg, where he was forced to stand with up to half of his body in liquid filth, with an iron pear filled with pepper in his mouth, gnawed on by rats, and had perished in the most horrible way.

But the sweetness of a happiness, which already stunned me in the mere expectation, stifled any fear, indeed any deliberation in me.

After a credible excuse, which the girl told to the old gray woman, and after my assurance, supported by a new shower of gold, that it was only a short walk, the woman, who did not seem to be at all inclined toward the doctor, let us go out the door, and we climbed down the stairs, both of us worried about an unpleasant encounter. We strode swiftly, Zephyrine under the cover of a cloak and a thick veil, down the street and unnoticed by my housemates, reached the quarters in Himmelfort Street.

There I learned everything I needed to know about the poor child. She was a four-year-old orphan, when Postremo took her in under the pretext of charity. During her childhood she was treated well and even received a very careful education. But this was not out of philanthropy, as had recently come out. A few months ago, when Zephyrine had reached the age of sixteen, Postremo told her that now the time had come for her to prove her gratitude to him and at the same time to establish her own happiness.

That mummy-like Count Johann Nepomuk Korony, whom I had seen at the gaming table at that time had agreed to pay his, Postremos, considerable debts, if Zephyrine would be his mistress in return, so that his almost completed life might once more be renewed. Moreover, the monster hoped that the untouched girl would, through her devotion be exposed to a certain genteel disease from him without being seized by it herself. Postremo had explained all this to the unfortunate child with cynical sincerity, and her tears and entreaties had only succeeded in doing one thing, that he once again made the attempt to improve his situation at the Pharaoh's table. On that gruesome and for me nevertheless so happy evening, this last hope of the completely ruined gambler collapsed and now he was holding the girl more than ever under seclusion, probably because he trusted that she would do everything to save herself. My appearance had taken place at the most extreme hour. For that suspicious person with whom I had seen him in the Greek coffee house was none other than the valet of Count Korony, and there was no doubt that the miserable Postremo was making the final preparations for his and the count's crime. The poor child was in the greatest fear, for she was well aware that the doctor was a master in the preparation of anesthetic medicines, which were able to eliminate all free will.

For days, she had eaten only the most meager food, so as not to fall victim to the demonic arts of her jailer, but still she saw the horrible moment inexorably approaching, which would put her in the grip of the spider-fingered lecherous old man.

While she told me, almost crying, of the agonies of the last days and of her almost collapsing hope for my help, I sent my servant to fetch a meal, to get him out of the house. For I knew that this child was my own and that only death could separate us. Every moment of happiness that lay ahead of me was too precious to miss.

It was clear to both of us without many words that we had always been destined for each other, and it cost the lovely and pure girl neither bridal tears nor difficult resolutions, to become completely mine. A holy and irresistible desire drove us to become one body and one soul, and neither of us could think of binding the eternity of our love by vows. We felt no shame in front of each other. Everything was as it had to be and fulfilled according to eternal laws. When I held the young, naked body in my arms for the first time and guarded the sleep of the dearest of all

creatures, I was suddenly seized by an inexplicable sensation which carried me away: first I was overcome by great fear, as if we were threatened by lambent flames. Then I heard a clock strike in the infinite distance. The smell of apples and foreign wood was around me, and as if by themselves my lips formed the word: Aglaja!

Everything had turned out perfectly. With money I had managed to get the most necessary papers, and in a small village not far from the capital our wedding ceremony had taken place, so that I no longer had anything to fear from the spies of the morals commission and probably also from Postremo. I had soon acknowledged my lodging, given the servant some money and dismissed him and for a little money I purchased a little house in Grinzing, hidden in the bushes and trees, which I furnished with the help of skilled and understanding craftsmen. Unclouded sunny days passed over us, and that unhappy time that soon follows the excess of happiness and is well known to all married couples, was spared us. It was as if each day brought us closer and more ardently together.

Often it happened to me that I called Zephyrine "Aglaja" in times of the highest emotion. But this peculiarity seemed to neither hurt nor astonish her, although I often told her of my dead, beloved cousin and of her resemblance to the girl who had been taken from me so early. Once she said:

"I am yours under all the names you want to give me."

She also shared with Aglaja a great love of flowers and animals. We had the garden full of rose bushes in all colors, the glowing scent of the red, the tartness of the white and the delicate yellow blossoms. On all the flower beds a riot of colors, and a sea of flowers balmy fragrances wafted over us.

Young animals played around us, dogs and cats, birds twittered in the branches, and nimble lizards glided over the gravel of the paths.

Very soon after the completed establishment of the house Zephyrine felt like a mother.

Heavy-bodied and pale, she sat in our favorite place between dense, flower-bearing bushes.

"It will be a boy with dark hair like his Father," I joked.

"No, I carry a little vixen of the female gender under my heart," she smiled back. "And she shall be called Aglaja."

I kissed her and looked into her gray, gold-spotted eyes, at the bottom of which there was still hidden something fearful. Carefully I moved the

pillow in the back of the delicate woman and thought to myself how happy I would be when she had her difficult hour behind her.

Then I saw a namelessly horrified expression on her face, and her gaze was fixed on something behind me. The dogs thrashed furiously in the kennel.

I turned around immediately. Behind me stood the hunchbacked doctor with the thick black eyebrows and the upturned nose. An unpleasant pungent smell of bitter almonds suddenly overpowered the scent of flowers.

With a grasp I seized the shapeless figure at the chest and shook it back and forth.

"Scoundrel!" I gritted between my teeth. "Have I got you now? You can't escape me alive-"

The hunchback turned blue-red and gasped something I did not understand.

The woman let out a loud scream, and when I looked around, she was in a deep swoon. At that moment I felt a burning sting on my right wrist. My hand, which still held the coat of the hunchback, was suddenly paralyzed, the fingers came loose, and the whole arm sank down dead at my side, dull and heavy. Horrified, I saw how the man indifferently wiped away a drop of blood from the flashing lancet with which he had stabbed me and put it back in the pocket of his coat.

"Oh it doesn't matter!" he laughed. "*Unapiccola para- lisi!* Doesn't last long - five minutes! You don't attack me, I won't attack you!"

He pulled a small can out of his vest and held it under the nose of his daughter. Zephyrine sneezed violently and immediately regained consciousness.

"Grandfather -," she said, as a shudder came over her.

"*Si, si, lo zio!*" he feigned. "*Il padre*, if you will, Zephyrine! Haven't you expected me, *Signore?*" he addressed me. "*O cattivo, cattivo!* What have you done? Eh?"

"I did not expect you here!" I told him. "For the time being, I'll keep my wife away from the sight of you and bring her to the house, and then I am at your disposal."

He sat down on one of the chairs with a mischievous laugh. My stunned arm had already recovered from the effect of the poisonous sting, so that I could support the wavering woman and bring her into the house. In front of the front door she was overcome by violent vomiting, and only

after a while was I was able to put her to bed in our bedroom. Sobbing, she begged me not to expose myself to any more danger. Despite his crippled body Postremo was one of the most dangerous and determined people. I reassured her as well as I could, and went to my room where I picked up a pistol with a live round, and then determined, went to the garden.

When I arrived at our favorite spot in the rose bushes, which was no longer an undiscovered refuge, the ugly monkey was sitting there and bared his yellow teeth. A lot of the beautiful roses lay torn off, torn apart and trampled on the ground.

In an intemperate fury, unable to speak a word, I pointed at the devastation.

The gnome spat at the maltreated flowers and struck at them with his foot.

"This is for you and *la putana* - you understand me?" he shouted. "*O Dio, Dio!* I am ruined. You have caused me to lose twenty thousand ducats!"

"You bawdy dog!" I snorted at him and raised my hand again.

He quickly drew his lancet from his pocket and flashed it in the sun.

"Next time it will not be good for your arm," he threatened. "Pay attention! You will not have any fun with me! But take a seat, my Herr of Dronte! "

I sat down and listened in mute rage to the whining conversation he was now starting. It was a vile outrage that he had been accused of playing matchmaker of the girl to Count Korony. Have I never heard of King David's virgin bedfellows? Was it unknown to me that in England Doctor Graham discovered a rejuvenation cure for old men, who are treated with virgins in the same bed, so that the withered body can be renewed by the youthful aura of the girls? And did I not know that for such a curative every conceivable precaution is taken, so that the honor of the girl remains unharmed! Who could dare to confuse such a medically proven healing method with the shameful expression "matchmaking"? And who finally would give him the twenty thousand ducats that I had deprived him of by kidnapping Zephyrine. Hey?

I answered him with great self-control, that his efforts were in vain. I was gladly prepared to pay him compensation of five hundred gold pieces. The money exceeded my assets by a significant amount.

He rolled his eyes, wrung his hands and renewed his attempts. He began to haggle, and when he realized that his efforts were in vain, he declared himself satisfied with a sum of one thousand ducats. That was his last word.

With a heavy heart I went into the house and fetched the money, the loss of which hit me hard. But for Zephyrine's peace of mind, this sacrifice was not too great.

When I went back to him with two hundred ducats and a bill of exchange for my banker, he had placed a small crystal flask on the table, in which there was an oily clear liquid.

"Here's the money -," I said, pushing the gold rolls and the paper toward him. He sniffed them most carefully and shoved everything into the pockets of his coat.

"And now -!" I said, pointing to the path that led to the garden door.

"Wait! Wait!" he cackled and pointed to the vial. "A little - how do you say? - Gift. Give every day' three drops to the Mother, and you will have a *bello ragazzo* - a son - and also, *se volete*, a little girl -"

I pointed again.

"*Va bene*," he murmured. "*Addio, Barone!*"

Slowly he shuffled down the path, his hump dragging like a snail its house. I followed him slowly, until the garden door had closed behind him and the furious barking of the dogs in the kennel had slowly died away. Through the bushes of the fence, however, I could clearly see how he with a grisly grimace, his lips moving in inaudible words, shook both fists against our house.

When I returned, the flask was still on the table. I made a movement to throw it in the bushes. But then I took it in my hand, pulled out the glass stopper and smelled it. Again, the smell of bitter almonds that seemed to cling to everything that was in its vicinity.

I didn't smash the shiny thing against a stone, did not pour its oily contents onto the earth. Some curiosity drove me to take it with me and to tell Zephyrine about it.

"Three drops a day, and a son is sure for us," said the villain. And, if we want, a girl, too!" I tried to laugh.

"Do you wish so much for a son, my dear?" breathed Zephyrine, and a fine blush passed over her pale, poor face.

"Oh, yes," escaped me, as I took her in my arms.

What did I care about the money? Everything I had, I would have given for her, the only one, and with pleasure I would have, like countless ones in the shadow of life earn bread for her and me with my hands.

The flowers had long since faded, red and yellow leaves danced from the trees, and the icy Boreas drove the first flakes against the windows of the parlor where Zephyrine lay in pain.

Fever had set in during the night; the quickly summoned midwife shook her head and said:

"The woman does not please me at all; a doctor must come and come quickly! She is also too weak to get down on the chair."

There was only one competent doctor in the vicinity, the white-haired Doctor Anselm Hosp, and I hurriedly sent for him.

While I waited in the next room and covered my ears to not hear the shrieking cries and the confused moaning of my wife, my hope for a good outcome darkened more and more. The pain and labor had lasted for days; the poor body of Zephyrine was terribly distended, and convulsions passed over it. There was no doubt that an obstacle stood in the way of the simple and natural course of the birth, the nature of which even the wise woman could not discern. Then I noticed that the odor of bitter almonds, which I detested still lingered in the house. Zephyrine, to whom I had given the vial with the drops of Postremos right after the ugly scene in the garden, claimed at that time to have knocked it over and broken the crystal vial, which is why the smell of almonds would not go away. Why did the thought of the gift of the hunchback suddenly seem so frightening?

The old doctor came with a big black bag in which instruments clinked. This sharp clinking went through my marrow and legs. I stepped quietly with him to the bed of the woman in labor and was startled when I saw the distorted, dilapidated, face of my Zephyrine covered with cold sweat, in which her large, bright eyes wandered and flickered. Sharp dark red spots stood out from the bloodless cheeks.

"You -" she sighed barely audibly.

I stepped close to her and whispered:

"Dearest, confess the truth - have you tasted of the hunchback's potion?"

A faint smile flitted across her suffering face.

"Only three drops -every day-"

"Why did you do it?" I snapped at her. "Why did you tell a lie, when I asked for the poisoner's bottle?"

"You -wanted- a- son- so - badly."

Like a breath, the words came to me. Then an expression of agony came into the wide-open eyes, the body stretched, the hands reached for the knotted cloths that had been tied to the bedposts for support. And how she cried out -!

The doctor made a brief examination and then beckoned me into the next room.

"Baron," said the doctor, "I am sorry to have to tell you that it is a case of displacement of the child and therefore the necessity of *sectio caesarea* has occurred."

I staggered back.

"A Caesarean section?" I stammered.

The doctor looked down at the floor.

"This bloody procedure, which, properly performed, is usually survived by strong and healthy women, but in our case, because of the terrible weakness of the Baroness and especially in the case of the high fever, the cause of which must be an external poisoning of the blood, it is a dangerous and uncertain operation. I cannot conceal this from you. Besides, I must operate immediately and only with the help of the midwife, although a second doctor would normally be necessary. But I don't dare wait any longer until a carriage can go to the city and back."

I felt as if I had been struck hard on the forehead. What, Zephyrine in mortal danger? That wasn't possible. That was nonsensical. What would become of me? Where was the meaning of life? Had the man from the Orient, whom I thought of every day with great gratitude, with his appearance in the Greeks' alley brought the highest happiness of my life, so that I would now lose it so cruelly and be pushed into the abyss of nameless pain? No, that could not be, that was impossible. If she died, I would die too.

A cry of the most terrible pain tore me out of my contemplations. I wanted to follow the doctor into my wife's room, but he beckoned me sternly and resolutely to go outside and await the outcome of his terrible undertaking. I let myself fall down on a chair, bare of all will and looked dully into the flakes outside. A bell called with a deep sound in the sinking

glow of the autumn day, and a dog began to howl. I recognized him by the voice. His name was Amando and he was Zephyrine's favorite. This high, drawn howl made me almost insane and increased my fear, since I was well aware of the foreboding of loyal animals. In between came sobbing sounds, suppressed cries from the next room. I heard the doctor groaning in some strenuous activity, giving half-loud orders, hearing the plaintive exclamations of the midwife, the clinking of vessels and metallic things, the splashing of water and the moving of chairs. Terrible things were going on in there.

Then a woman cried out. But it was not Zephyrine who screamed. It was the wailing midwife. Why did she scream? Clearly was to be heard, as the doctor rebuked her in an angry, suppressed voice.

I held on to the back of my heavy chair, my whole body shaking.

Then it was quiet inside, dead quiet.

The doctor stepped out and looked around confusedly. In the light of the wax candles that I had lit, I noticed that his face was dripping. His hands showed reddish marks.

Wordlessly I looked at his mouth.

"You need inner strength," he said slowly, and a solemn glow spread over his face.

"Enter and make the sacrifice, of concealing your own pain, so that the dying may fall asleep without a soul martyr."

I felt a burning pain that took my breath, clenched my teeth and went slowly into the next room. Through the veil of tears that, despite all my intentions, inexorably ran from my eyes, I saw a small table, with a bloodstained sheet that covered, something lying there, the mere outlines of which sent horror through my nerves. Then I stepped up to the bed and knelt down.

Zephyrine opened her eyes with great effort. Her face was white as snow; her lips were torn by her own teeth. I grasped her hand, light and cool as a rose petal, and pressed it to my heart. Then she smiled. Whispering, her lips moved.

"It -is- a - little - son - as I - asked for it - from heaven - and for me a little vixen -a little Aglaja- Later may I see the children - ?"

The doctor, who was standing on the other side of the bed beckoned to me, "Yes."

"Certainly, dearest -as soon as you are asleep," I said, thinking that my heart must burst. But suddenly fear entered her gaze. She tried to straighten up, but fell back powerlessly.

"Or - must- I- die?"

"Zephyrine!" I cried and covered her hand with kisses. "Don't talk like that -you sin. Everything is fine. Only you must sleep, rest and gain new strength after what you have suffered."

"I - have suffered it - gladly - for you-and for me," she smiled. "I am so -joyful- that I -may- stay -with- you."

Her hand pulled -me- closer- with a strange strength.

"But I want- your face - to stay - close - to - me."

I drew as close to her as I could. Her tired eyes suddenly widened, fastened on me with an expression of thirsty desire, held me tightly - her gaze remained staring deep into my eyes.

I sat like that for a long time.

Then someone stepped behind me and touched my arm.

It was the doctor.

"You have held your own, poor Herr Baron. She crossed over easily and blissfully."

And only then I saw that on Zephyrine's angelic face was the holy radiance of eternity.

I could not cry, could not think.

Aglaja lay before me. White and beautiful, as I carried her image in my heart.

Was the bell still ringing? Or was it the raging blood that hummed in my ears?

"Do you feel strong enough to look at the cause of death?" the doctor pulled me out of my brooding.

It was all so indifferent now that she was dead.

But the sight that now came to me was so terrible that it forced a sobbing cry from me. I drew back and barely felt it when my head hit the door jamb. A small well-formed torso lay there. And this small body carried on the shoulders two necks, and on the necks sat two heads.

One of them had fine, dark hair, the other one golden red curls.

"Moreover, this strange monster was a true hermaphrodite, man and woman at the same time -"

I fought back, ran past the crying midwife into the other room, threw myself over the table, and a dry sob choked my throat.

The doctor sat down silently next to me and waited.

When I had regained my composure I told him about the drops that that wretch had talked us into and which I had left undestroyed in recklessness.

Doctor Hosp thought for a long time and then said:

"I remember having heard once, that an Italian doctor had succeeded by certain poisons to produce monstrous deformities of the fruit in pregnant women. But it seems to me not very credible, that such interventions in the most secret workshop of nature -"

A terrible thought rose in me.

Without caring any more about the doctor, without listening to his anxious questions about what I was going to do next. I tore open the door of the weapons cabinet, took out a double barreled pistol, tore my hat and coat from the hook and rushed out into the snowfall.

Just as I stepped out of the garden, a carriage drove slowly by.

I shouted to the driver to take me to the Fassl house as fast as the horses could run. He looked at me stupidly. I took several gold pieces, pressed them into his hand. He pulled his hat, the blow worked. The whip whistled, the horses leaped out.

When I came to, I was standing in the half-dark hallway of the house. Someone was rubbing me over the face with a wet sponge that smelled of lavender vinegar.

Only one word droned in my head, "- Gone -"

"Yes, Herr, you must believe me," said a stolid woman. "Thank God that the crook is gone. Already two months ago he left in the night and fog, and his things have been taken away by the court."

I heard something else about a young girl who had died after a forbidden operation that Postremo had performed.

Gone!

I let out a maniacal laugh.

I was taken to the waiting carriage, and I left.

The snow swirled, the wind whistled through the open windows. The houses moved with night-blind windows. She was dead, she was dead!

Never again ---.

I was only an empty shell, clothes draped on a soulless body. I ate now and then, fell asleep on chairs, and found myself dressed in bed. My eyes were inflamed, my clothes, which I never changed, unclean and damaged. I did not know the time of neither day, felt neither heat nor cold and let my people do as they pleased. Sometimes burning longing ate at me, and I ran restlessly through the rooms and the garden sobbing, calling Zephyrine's name, calling her Aglaja, too, to lure her back. For days I sat at her grave, until the gravediggers kindly reminded me that the gates were closed. And to my consolation they showed me the corner where the unconsecrated ground was, a little under which lay my wife's favorite dog, Amando.

Amando, who had come to her last resting place, would not leave, had refused food and drink and had died of grief and hunger.

When I began to feel the healing effect of time, I sent for a notary public and gave the house and garden, along with a sufficient sum to a foundation for crippled children, who from birth had to carry miserable and deformed bodies from birth. I myself moved into the large inn "Golden Lamb" and made my departure from the city, where everything pained me; since I was reminded by everything and everyone, that just a short while ago Zephyrine's eyes had rested on it.

From her I had kept only a little tuft of her hair and the silver ring with the fire opal, which first Aglaja and then she had worn. Her fingers had been as slender and fine as those of my cousin. The little curl of Zephyrine's, however, mixed so much with Aglaja's in Muhme's pale blue box, that one could no longer distinguish and separate them.

I wanted to go to a foreign country. Just far away from here. When I walked haphazardly through the streets I often noticed that I bumped into people and they looked at me strangely. Ordinary people in their unconcerned way probably pointed at their own foreheads and laughed. All this did not touch me in any way.

So, wandering aimlessly outside the city, I came to a place called Lustwäldchen. There it was taken care of that the attention of the people remained active. Nobody cared about my behavior, which, even unconscious to myself, was certainly conspicuous enough by nervous twitches in the face and other consequences of my mental suffering. Here there were various booths and huts, dancing bears, cake bakers, fortune tellers, canvas theaters, plus vendors and all kinds of market criers. Boys

and girls frolicked together in a circle on blue and white or yellow and red painted wooden horses to the sound of music.

I passed tents from which came the false cries of trumpets and the sound of drums. A sword swallower in tinsel trousers stood with his neck bent back in a circle of gawkers, and next to him dirty hands were fishing pickles out of a barrel.

And in the midst of the swarm I saw - like an unreal apparition - Laurette on the arm of a tall, lean man with a brown face. She wanted to pour out with laughter at the crude and mean jokes of a buffoon, who pulled off his pants on a podium and showed a hairy devil's butt. Two southern servants in dark livery stood behind the couple. Laurette did not see me.

I walked on, ignoring the fatigue of my feet, and then stopped in front of a large booth on which a painting on canvas captivated me. In front of a smoking fire stood an old wizard with pointed cap, and a ribbon with the signs of the zodiac slung around his shoulder and hips. His left hand was buried in his white beard; the right held a small staff toward the smoke, in which a figure wrapped in a white veil, with closed eyes appeared dimly. Under this not completely artless image, but nevertheless in screaming colors, the following was written to read:

"The famous necromancer, magician and magister of the seven liberal arts Arkadius Chrysopompus from Ödenburg, called the Hungarian Doctor Faust."

A colorful harlequin, who just a moment ago was playing the tinkling sounds of a Savoyard lyre was now sounding a brass horn, inviting the audience with all kinds of joking, contorted gestures and loud shouting to visit the performance that was about to begin. Two grenadiers in white coats, who had colorfully dressed, busty girls on their arms, were the first to enter. Then went a few citizens with their wives and some young people of both sexes went up the three steps, paid a pittance and pushed their way through the red curtain, which the crier lifted. For some reason I followed and soon sat in the midst of the people on a bench in front of the small, dimly lit stage.

The performance, which began with a few rough slaps for the harlequin, was as I had much expected with the magician, dressed as on the figurehead. With his beard hung around his neck he performed a series of quite artful sleight-of-hand and card tricks, baked an omelet in a hat, which a fat citizen hesitantly offered, fetched endless ribbons, white barnyard

rabbits and a glass jar with floating little fishes from it and finally crushed a golden watch in a mortar, only to find it unharmed in the purse of an embarrassed giggling girl.

Then he moved on to the more difficult arts and tore off the heads of a white dove and a black dove and healed them in the twinkling of an eye, so that the black bird had a white head, and the white bird now had a black head. But this showpiece produced such a violent nausea in me that I wanted to get up and leave the room. But since I would have had to fight my way through the crowded rows of people sitting and would have had to make everyone get up, I closed my eyes for a while until I felt that the discomfort was subsiding.

When I looked up again, through murmurs of applause and the admiration of the spectators, I saw the well-done picture of a moonlit cemetery on the stage. A slender, beardless man, wrapped in a black cloak, walked up and down between the grave crosses and told in his soliloquy, that a ghost often appeared here, and that he wanted to find out who the evil doer was that was certainly behind the appearance of such spirits.

Behind the stage the midnight hour was signaled by twelve tinkling bells, and after the fading of the last stroke, which was followed by an artificially generated whirring of the wind, a being wrapped in white shrouds floated between the crosses and approached the man. This man seemed to be frightened at first, but then he swiftly drew his sword and stabbed the ghost. One saw clearly, how the flashing blade went through the body of the ghost, without doing him any harm. But now the boastful one threw the sword away and fled, whereupon the white creature performed a triumphant dance and the curtain rushed down. The performance was over, and the audience departed highly satisfied.

I also stood up and approached the stage. My guess was correct. The invulnerable apparition was a mirror image, through a slanting glass plate, in front of which, lying on a kind of platform, an actor made the ghost, whose image was thrown onto the stage. The glass plate was made of three equal pieces, set together, and the two dark, vertical stripes of shadow, which had been visible on the stage during the performance, had immediately led me to this assumption.

I now thought of leaving and noticed that there was no one left in the audience but me. But nevertheless I was not alone. Inaudibly a person had crept up to me, probably unaware of my intentions, and even though I faced him so unexpectedly, I recognized in him the sleight of hand magician in a robe as well as the cemetery fencer.

I apologized and told him that I only had a scientific interest in how it was done and was fully satisfied with it. In no case was it my intention, to retell what I had discovered, which by the way had been known to me for a long time, to impair his success.

"The gentleman is obviously a connoisseur," the man said very politely and bowed. "Perhaps I have the honor of seeing a master of white magic before me?"

"Not this one," I replied. "I only wanted to know whether the excellent effect produced by the phantom was created with the help of large

concave mirrors or with the sloping glass plate. Glass plates of such size are, as far as I know very precious and, as I understand it, are made only in Venice"

"I see that the gentleman is excellently instructed," replied the magician. "The three plates are our most valuable possessions and require a great deal of caution when traveling."

I thanked him with a few words and went toward the curtain, in front of which the harlequin was once again making noise and shouting.

"If, however, the gentleman wished to make use of my actual art," said the other, falteringly, and made a gesture with his hand toward the ground on which we were standing.

A foreboding seized me.

"What you see here," said the other, "serves only the curiosity of the uneducated people and the acquisition of the bare necessities of life. For the deeply initiated, I am the necromancer Magister Eusebius Wohlgast from Ödenburg, and I have indeed already been honored with the name of the Hungarian Dr. Faust. I would have to be very wrong, if the wishes of the gentleman, whose outward appearance already announces the deepest and unhealed sorrow, not to offer the most glowing reunion with a beloved person who had been torn from him by cruel death."

I laughed bitterly.

"You think I am more simple-minded than I am, Herr Magus Wohlgast," I returned. "With the smoke of poisonous herbs, which completely cloud the clear mind, and with a hidden *laterna magica*, one can show gullible people what they wish to see."

The man shook his head with a smile and replied gently and modestly:

"People of my standing, who live in moving wagons, must put up with being counted among the great crowd of wandering jugglers and swindlers. To dispel this suspicion, I expressly declare to you that I do not claim any salary if you want to accept my services in this respect. It is entirely up to you whether or not you want to give me a reward after the work is done, or under the impression of having been duped, to refrain from such. I also know very well in whose service I put my art, and remain unconcerned about profit, as much as I have to reckon with a net income. Incidentally, I recently enjoyed the extremely high honor of receiving such

a request from His Imperial Roman Majesty in the rooms of the Masonic Lodge "To the Three Fires". Although His Majesty, as a result of a very gripping apparition which moved him to the other world, was frightened and had to spend a few days in bed until his insulted mind had calmed down again. I was granted a very handsome reward. It may serve as a testimony to you that neither His Majesty nor the noble gentlemen present regarded me as an impostor, but rather left the temple of the Freemasons very moved and in silence. Yes, it was even said to protect me from the persecution that Her Majesty the Empress ordered to be instituted against me, when she discovered through an informant gentleman the cause of the illness of her husband."

Contradictory feelings stirred in me. The man seemed to me to be honest and sure of his rare abilities. But my distrust could not be eliminated so quickly.

"Whom or whose spirit did you make appear before His Majesty?" I asked.

"To speak of that to anyone, even a trustworthy cavalier, I am neither permitted, nor is it in my habits," he declined. "I would also decline to communicate with third persons about apparitions which might come to the Lord if my most humble services were to be called upon."

My desire to experience this man's art grew at his words and I spoke:

"If it would be possible for you to call back a person, who has departed from this life and is very dear to me, I would be more than grateful to you."

He made a dismissive movement.

"That is left to the discretion of the Lord, who is, in spite of all the negligence of his exterior caused by his grief, is a distinguished nobleman."

"So how should I behave, and when should this summoning go ahead?" I asked quickly, because two people had already entered the tent and forced us to speak quietly.

"I ask the Lord to be here in three days, half an hour before midnight. On the day when the work is to take place, the Lord must abstain absolutely from all food and drink, with the exception of pure water. Then a purification of the body and fresh, clean clothes are needed. In addition, an object should be brought that was the property of the deceased person, if possible, something that was worn on the body. Strictest secrecy against

anyone, whoever it may be, is a commandment, the non-observance of which makes all in vain."

"I have understood and will observe all this," I said. "Nothing else is required?"

"Nothing more for the gentleman."

"And you?"

"I, my lord, must fast from today, a full three days, fast. My brother and our assistant will hold the performance here. I must prepare myself in solitude until the hour of the invocation."

I looked at him doubtfully, but the place was so filled to such an extent that further conversation was not possible. The Hungarian Magus did not pay any further attention to me, but walked right away toward the curtain. I saw him speaking some hasty words with the colorfully dressed harlequin, who nodded seriously.

"So in three days -" I said in passing.

"Around midnight," he replied, and disappeared into the crowd in front of the booth.

When I deliberately passed by after a while, the harlequin had disappeared, and the man, who until then had attracted the public with his multicolored costume, was now standing in the robe in front of the entrance and invited the audience to enter.

In deep thought, I started on my way home to my inn.

God himself had annealed my soul in the furnace of pain. I felt it deeply in the loneliness of the day, on which I prepared myself fasting for the evening with the Magus. How different my whole being had become since that hour, when my beloved had slipped away into the realm of shadows. The old irascibility which had still sometimes flashed up in me, the arrogance, of which I often enough made myself guilty, the addiction to the pleasures of the table and diversions of various kinds, the tendency to lust - all this had fallen away from me and seemed to me void and stale. The glamour, with which life presents itself to a man, was extinguished for me under the gray dust of transience.

Only one thing stood firm in my heart: the certainty that I would see Zephyrine again. She and Aglaja, because they were one and the same creature of God, destined for me and taken from me again and again for the unknown purposes of eternal powers.

During the day I had stayed in my inn room and had answered every disturbance with the indication of indisposition and the need for rest. In the course of the night, as the hand approached the eleventh hour, I left the house and took the long way to the pleasure grove.

The weather was damp and mild, and the spring wind rattled under the roof tiles and made the weather vanes creak. The path was dry. A long train of dark clouds chased across the bright moon, like strange, stretched out running animal shapes.

Once or twice I was stopped by roundabouts or police check points and was forced to show my papers and to arrange my answers to the questions in such a way that it could be inferred that I was on a secret love affair, which would be unthinkable for a gentleman. In such a way, which caused me enough displeasure, it was possible for me to get through and even in the Egyptian darkness under the lanterns blown out by the storm, ask for further directions from the public. For it was not at all easy for me in such great darkness, which was illuminated only at times by the crescent moon, to find the way to the Lustwäldchen.

There I went astray a few times between the shapeless tents and booths, which in the powerful darkness looked completely different than in broad daylight. But the Magus and his brother seemed to have attentively been on the lookout for me, because when I, after looking around in vain tried to go in another direction, a man suddenly stepped up to me, whom I recognized as the harlequin, grabbed my wrist and said softly and quickly:

"Come, Baron - we have been waiting for a long time."

He led me between the darkened wagons and the canvas tents to a large booth, from the crevices of which a very dim, bluish light penetrated, opened a slit somewhere on the wall and gently pushed me in front of him. The next moment I was standing on the small stage behind the lowered curtain.

In the background still hung the cemetery scene with the crosses and tombstones from the performance. The sides of the stage were closed with dark curtains, so that I found myself in a square of moving walls.

A few oil lamps made of blue glass gave a weak but immensely pleasant and cold light, in which one saw quite well after some habituation. I sat down at the invitation of the brother in a reasonably comfortable chair that had been placed for me. A copper basin with weakly glowing coals stood before me. The brother approached me and whispered:

"Don't speak to him when he comes. -Have you brought the property of the person you wish to see?"

After some persuasion, I took the silver ring with the fire opal out of my vest pocket and put it into his hand, and he went to one of the side curtains, in the folds of which he disappeared. Immediately he placed a bowl with grains in it next to the coal fire and a small three-legged stool.

Then the curtain opposite me moved violently, and the magus appeared. He was clothed in a dark, wide robe and wore around his head a white cloth, as I had already seen in old pictures. His face was pale gray and decayed, his eyes half closed. He did not seem to see me and walked with his hands stretched out in front of him like a blind man towards the ember pan. His brother came quickly behind him, guided him with his hands and pushed him down on the stool. Motionless the magician remained seated. The brother took one of his hands hanging down, opened, as it seemed to me, the closed fingers, and put the ring in his hand, which immediately closed again. Then he pushed up a similar stool for himself and scattered grains from the copper bowl over the crackling and smoldering coals. Immediately a blue, pleasantly fragrant smoke rose up with a similar fragrance as that precious incense, used by the Catholic Church on high feast days.

Immobile and without any sign of attention, the magus sat in front of me and slightly behind him the brother, on whose haggard and hollow-cheeked face the traces of progressed pulmonary addiction were easily recognizable as the seal of an early death. I turned my attention to the other again and now saw that his eyes were directed at me with a fixed, lusterless look. At the same time a swelling, melodic humming and ringing began and I discovered that the brother had a Jew's harp between his teeth and was playing it with the index finger of the right hand keeping the tongue of the instrument in a constant buzz.

The Magus sat there for the time being in unchanged posture. Slowly, however, his head sank crookedly against his right shoulder, and his mouth opened. The hand that held the ring began to twitch softly. Thus we sat for some time in the blue light, and the hum and whisper of the music rose and fell.

Suddenly, however, I noticed between the open lips of the motionless magus something that looked like the end of a bluish-white, luminous cloth, which gradually began to emerge.

Moreover, it began to throb and knock behind my chair, and this sound momentarily continued with even greater force into the wooden floor, to then rise again into the chair, so that I had to listen several times to the short, sharp blows with the greatest clarity at my back and involuntarily looked around. But there was no one behind or beside me, although the knocking continued with undiminished strength. The white tissue came out of the mouth of the sleeper almost to his chest and then disappeared just as quickly as it had come, and the knocking ceased with a crashing blow in the left armrest of my armchair. In the deep silence the brother reached past the magus once again into the incense bowl on the floor and sprinkled grains on the coals. Something cold touched my cheek unexpectedly and stroked my forehead. I reached out quickly, but grabbed the empty air. But on the Magus's shoulder a large snow-white hand appeared, with its flat fingers shaped almost like a glove. But then it stretched in an excessively long, arm-like gesture over his head, sank down, and lay quietly for a while like a third arm on his knee, until everything faded away in a few moments and became invisible. However, the sleeper now began to become restless, swayed back and forth with his upper body and let a quiet, wailing singsong be heard, whose words I could not understand.

It began to knock again very strongly against the floor and then against my chair, and an empty stool, which stood at the curtain and which I had overlooked so far, did four or five frog-like leaps towards me, then turned around, stayed for a while with its three legs stretched out in the air, and then began to turn slowly in circles on the seat board. I suspected that strong magnetic fluids were now active, which had been obviously lying in deep slumber at the beginning. But at the same time the trembling melody of the player strengthened and accelerated, and the so far rocking motions of the magus changed into violent and convulsive twitching, which seemed very uncanny, all the more so because the newly nourished fragrant smoke intensified and the two persons opposite me appeared quite shadowy and unreal.

Then it seemed to me as if a folded, shimmering piece of white cloth was lying there next to the charcoal basin, which had not been there before. It moved in its center in an incomprehensible way, as if a very small child or an animal were covered by the linen and caused it to rise. But quickly the strange cloth or the luminous mist grew in height, became taller and narrower and seemed to want to take on the shape of a human being. I

looked in the utmost expectation straining to see and believed to perceive the folds of a garment and limbs. It was a human figure that arose before me.

And all at once, as if paralyzed by joyful fright, I saw the completely pale and almost transparent beloved face of Zephyrine, her eyes were fixed on me - but then something grew out of the delicate head, from fine threads - glittering and shining - Aglajas' crown of the dead -

I wanted to jump up, to wrap my arms around the woman that I so ardently longed for - But before my eyes veils were laid, my feet were stuck in leaden shoes, my heart stood still.

Everything had disappeared. I saw only the raw stage floor, the smoky, sweet smoke, the magus, who had fallen from the stool with his eyeballs twisted and lay in convulsions. The music fell silent.

Feet thumped on the flooring. The brother hurriedly pulled the magus up, ran his cloth-wrapped hand into his mouth and pulled out his tongue. With a wild gasp the magician opened his eyes, looked around him and heaved a sigh.

"Wake up, Eusebius!" cried the brother, shaking him gently. "Wake up! Wake up!"

The magus looked first at him, then at me, and then let his gaze go in circles, as if he first had to think about where he was. He shuddered violently, grabbed his forehead with his hand, stared at me and gurgled:

"Two--two there were--two--"

The other hurriedly fetched a tin cup and a bottle, poured a dark, strong-smelling wine into the vessel and held it to the brother's lips. He drank in greedy gulps, put it down, and drank again.

I discovered that my cheeks were wet with tears.

After a long effort, aided by his assistant, the necromancer stood up and walked swaying toward me. His face was slack and covered with sweat.

"The ring --" he stammered.

I took the silver jewel and kept it with me.

"Why two?"

He stretched out his hand toward me. It was trembling violently.

"Why two, Herr?"

I nodded and said softly, "There were two, and yet there is only one."

"Never again -," he groaned, leaning on his brother.

"Terrible -- I had - already crossed the - threshold."

"What's the matter with you, Eusebius?"

"The hunchback -" he cried out. "Two heads - two children's heads -."

And without consciousness he collapsed, saved from a heavy fall by his brother's arm. He looked at me helplessly, spat bloody sputum and stammered:

"Enough, Lord - enough! Have mercy!"

I pressed a large gift into his hand. His poor, gaunt face beamed with joy for a moment, and then he held out the gold to the fainting man and shouted:

"Look here, Eusebius - look here!"

He let go of the body of the brother, who twitched softly, gently let it slide to the ground and pointed to the gap in the wall of the tent.

"It took a lot out of him this time," he whispered. "The day is already coming up. - Was the Lord pleased?"

Full of compassion for these poor people, inwardly stirred in my innermost being, and yet with a bright glow of supersensible hope in my chest, I walked through the gray, rain-soaked morning towards the awakening city.

For a long time I lived quietly and absorbed only in the memory of happy days in a small, secluded place and thought to end my life there.

One morning, however, in front of the baker's shop, a casserole appeared which became of great importance for me. A foreign artisan, who had wanted to buy bread, was accused by the baker of trying to cheat him with fake money, amidst a large crowd of curious people. The poor fellow, well acquainted with the cruel punishments that were set for such misdemeanors, fought back with all his might, when he saw me coming, cried out with a loud voice:

"Lord, help me! Protect me!"

The people, all of whom knew me and had come to me for the insignificant good deeds I had done to one person and another, but especially to the children, held affection for me, made room for me, and some of them said:

"That's right! The Lord Baron shall decide whether it is a gold piece or merely a bad penny, which the lad has put on the baker's table."

I looked at the gold piece. It was a Turkish Zechine like the five I had kept from the treasure in the ruin. The curly writing on the coin appeared

not only to the baker, but also to the other people as so nonsensical that they ignored the weight of the gold, but took it as a false ducat and the fellow for a bag cutter.

When the people were enlightened and we weighed the piece on the baker's gold scales, and for greater certainty tested it against a stone the poor wandering cloth shearer still had a number of silver and copper coins change in addition for his bread. I asked him how he had come into possession of the coins, which were certainly an extremely rare type of coin. And then I received an answer, which completely and forever destroyed my hitherto quiet life like a fiery bolt of lightning.

A nearby stranger had given him the money, said the lad, and told him to go to this place, where he would learn more. Half-starved, he was trudging along the street, when a handsome man with a black cloth around his forehead, had come towards him. He denied trying to cheat anyone and had gotten the money from him. Breathlessly I asked whether he had been dressed like some kind of monk. But the lad remembered only a black headscarf and the beautiful, dark eyes of the mild benevolent man. He had turned around and looked after the stranger, but he had completely disappeared from the long, straight road.

This information, together with the certainty that the mysterious man from the Orient was not even three days journey from here and had shown himself in the flesh, excited me to such an extent that I ordered a special mail coach for the next day, to possibly follow his trail, until I would be face to face with him and find answers to all the questions that had occupied me for many years, indeed all my life. When I gathered together money for the journey, I also got hold of the Turkish zechins. I was amazed and frightened. There were only four left. A strange feeling came over me, a search for a memory. But it sank again, and a new mystery remained.

The next day I was already riding merrily along in the coach and with changed horses had reached the large forest, late in the afternoon, through which the road led to the village, not far from the place where the honest cloth shearer had come to his golden zechine. But just as we passed the village and the coach driver was merrily singing the "Jäger aus Kurpfalz" on his horn, the wheel broke and the poor musician was torn off the seat by the reins wrapped around his left hand by the falling horse to such an extent that he could only rise with a groan and with a pained face explained that he needed to put cold compresses on his sore shoulder before he could hold the

reins again. Also the fallen bay, who had skinned his knee, needed rest and treatment. If the coach didn't want to become a wreck between the village and the town both people and animals needed to be treated.

Indecisively, I stood in the midst of the astounded village youth by the badly battered coach, when an old woman came up to me and said:

"Your quarters are ready, as we were told, and also the postman can get a bed and a bite to eat. There is room for the nags in the reverend gentleman's stable!"

I was very surprised at this reception and asked who had announced me and whether the whole thing wasn't a misunderstanding? There was certainly an inn in the village where one could stay if necessary.

"No, Herr," the woman continued and went ahead of me as a guide without further ado. "We have no inn here, and strangers of repute whom chance brings here, are accustomed to stay in the parsonage, which is in the vicarage, which is built on a large scale and contains enough furnished rooms. The preparations for the lord, however, have been ordered by the Reverend. Nothing else is known to me, other than that the parish priest, who is currently with a dying man, instructed me to keep a watchful eye on the road and not to miss the announced guest."

In the meantime we had arrived at the stately house next to the church, and I stepped through the door, above which hung, on iron chains, the bones of extinct animals on iron chains, into a hallway paved with gray bricks, and from there into a vaulted, white-painted room, in the middle of which stood a large table with leather chairs. On the wall was a rack with many books, among which I noticed the works of Paracelsus. On top of them were stuffed birds of a rare kind, as the storm sometimes brings them here from foreign zones, and all kinds of minerals and fossilized ammonium horns. On the simple desk by the window was enthroned the figure of a woman holding a child in her arms, and in my opinion was as much the mother of our Lord and Savior as a pagan goddess. Above a black painted prayer stool hung with arms outstretched, the face of a silent suffering person, the Savior on the cross.

After a while the old woman put a brass lamp on the table and the room was filled with a friendly yellow light, the priest entered almost at the same time.

He was a tall man with gray hair and a face, from which smart and thoughtful eyes peered out. Friendly, he offered me his hand, looked at me

attentively and asked me to be his guest at the table. After the meal he wanted to solve for me the riddle that the knowledge of my arrival had thrown me into. Also the mail coach driver had already been accommodated and the carriage was at the blacksmith's, and the horses, were safe in the stable.

Immediately, the table was set and the food was served, which consisted of a larded pike in cream. We drank a light currant wine with it. When we were finished with the meal the priest asked if he might be allowed to smoke tobacco, and lit a pipe.

I must confess that, in spite of the inner calm I had learned to regard everything that happened as an unchangeable providence, and a great curiosity seized me, in which way the clergyman could have been informed of my imminent arrival, and I requested him to enlighten me about this strange matter, after my name and state had been pronounced.

"It is indeed, as you say, strange- worthy enough," he replied and blew blue smoke in great clouds away from himself. "Three days ago I went down the village street according to my habit to pray my breviary.

A couple of people who came toward me astonished me so much at the sight of them, that I stopped and let them approach. I knew the woman. It was eighty year old Nenin, who, in spite of her old age and her weakness at this time of the day, gathered together a large bundle of brushwood. It had always been a sight, to see the weak old woman, who was still active in such a way, swaying under her load. And not infrequently, I had unceremoniously asked some loitering, partying lad to take the burden from the poor woman and carry it home. This time, however, she came without the usual piggyback and seemed to me upright, almost as if rejuvenated next to her companion, who, as she said, had voluntarily taken the burden from her and loaded it effortlessly on his shoulders. The man, however, with whom she went, had in any case an appearance that would astonish anyone in this country. Namely he wore-

"A brown robe and a black headscarf or a turban of such color and amber beads around his neck --", I finished, quivering with expectation.

The priest looked at me without astonishment and said:

"So then the following miracle partially dissolves into nothing. I say partially, for it remains wonderful that neither the old woman nor the tailor who happened to come from the field, who loaded the bundle of brushwood onto his handcart and drove Nenin home with it, seemed to see anything

special or conspicuous in the man dressed so strangely. Through later questions I became convinced that the two people had not even been aware of the unusual costume. But the other thing, namely that this man informed me of your arrival and predicted it for today is now explained by the fact that you obviously know him and have certainly spoken to him of your journey."

I assured the spiritual gentleman most eagerly that I had seen the aforementioned man from afar several times in my life, but that I had never spoken a word to him.

The priest looked at me and shook his head.

"So the experience is now again a miracle and in need of some explanation. Namely, when the old woman and the tailor went their way with the brushwood and I was alone with the stranger in the brown robe and eye to eye with him, I felt the natural desire to learn from him something about his origin and the destination of his journey. Moreover, there was in his look and in the truly noble features of his face such a strong attraction that it was impossible for me to keep my eyes off him. That he was from the Orient, I recognized easily by his appearance. And since I had once learned the Arabic language years ago, I dared to use this language and the solemn greeting 'Salem aleikum!', that is: Peace be with you!"

And in this tongue the stranger exceedingly kindly and sweetly gave this beautiful blessing back to me and added: "When the sun sets for the third time, a man will appear in this place who is looking for me. Call him your guest!"

And when I agreed to this, moved by a peculiar emotion, and added the question of where I should direct the newcomer, he only answered:

"To the big house at the end of the forest."

With that he bowed his head with a beautiful gesture and went to the forest, from which Nenin had fetched her brushwood. But no sooner had the first bushes covered him, when it occurred to me that there could be many of them, especially if locks are also included. And then I ran after him, in order to get more details out of him. But no matter how I searched and called, I could find no trace of him. Certainly he had gone his way with quicker steps than I had suspected, and disappeared from my sight. I also confess that this experience had upset me so much that I can no longer say today how long I stood in thought while he walked away from me. This

makes it easy to explain his disappearance without the assumption of a supernatural event.

After these words, silence descended upon us, and we sat for a long time, each occupied with his own thoughts. That which I would have liked to say, I had to keep to myself. Nothing could have moved me to reveal to another, even if he might be as worthy and as trustworthy as this priest, the dark and hidden ways of my life. And that is what I would have had to explain to him, even casually, my inexplicable connection to Ewli. But was there an explanation at all? Was it not rather that by the last appearance of the miracle man everything had only become more confused and unclear?

Unless, and this thought seized me with penetrating force, that the friend of my childhood, now that old age had taken me in its weary arms, considered that the time had come to reveal himself to me. Then, of course the appearance at the baker's, the broken wagon wheel, the Arabic-speaking priest were clear, even if unusual signposts to that place, to the "great house", where at last the inexplicable and incomprehensible things in my life would find an explanation of some kind.

"Well - in any case, it is good not to forget the arts practiced in younger years," my host interrupted my thoughts. "And so I am glad that for once in this life I have unexpectedly and strangely used my knowledge of Arabic!

"I wish, reverend Herr, that I had been in your place, and skilled in the same language, to be able to speak with Ewli."

Hastily, the clergyman put the pipe down on the table and looked me in the face with an almost frightened look and repeated:

"Ewli? How do you come up with that word?"

I saw that now, after all, I had to share somewhat of the role that the man from the East had played in my life, and I told him in short words about the incident in my earliest childhood, with the little wax man under the glass and the collapsing ceiling above my shell bed, and how the figurine disappeared in this accident and was never found and how he was always called "The Oriental or Ewli" without my knowing what this last word meant.

The priest drummed his fingers on the table, shook his head several times as if to deny a thought that was trying to emerge, and at last he only managed to utter only one word:

"Mysterium!"

"Whether the word Ewli implies a name or a characteristic I do not know. It comes from my grandfather, who brought the rarity back from the lakeside city of Venice and held it in high esteem. When I was a child, there was --"

With great, hitherto unseen vivacity, my host interrupted me:

"So listen then, Baron Dronte, how divine providence often intervenes in human life and how, according to the will of the Most High, people must find each other and have to communicate with each other, that no coincidence, as it is called, could ever bring to light. Today, when I made the necessary arrangements for your reception, I was called to a dying man, named Milan Bogdan, a very elderly cottager, who had been an Austrian soldier and who had been given his severance pay and had come here many years ago with this and a few guilders he had saved. He stayed, got married and had a small sprite which he had obtained, perhaps from the eternal gardens of God. This old Croatian imperial soldier was a good and righteous man and, moreover, a good Catholic Christian, in whom it was my pleasure to visit not only for the sake of his faith, but also for his diligence and his peaceableness. He has been lying for a long time, and as often as the barber has drained the water from him, it rises to his heart again and brings danger of death. That's why Bogdan had already received the last sacraments two days ago with much devotion. And so I was surprised that he hurriedly asked for me today. But I went to him without hesitation, and when I saw that he had sent his old wife and his two sons out of the room I said that this was not necessary, since he had a clean account with the good Lord and that a new confession was certainly not necessary. But he fiercely insisted on his will, and so they left him alone with me, and I sat down at his bedside.

"What else is troubling you, dear son?" I asked.

"Nothing is distressing me - nothing, reverend," he said with a heavy heart. "My sins are forgiven. And yet I cannot sleep quietly in God's bosom until a pious and learned man explains to me an event that happened to me when I was a soldier and which I think about now more than ever."

So I challenged him to talk unabashedly, and then he explained something to me, which I share with you, Baron Dronte, as something that is not under the seal of confession and, above all, a strange fact, especially for you.

Bogdan was thus abducted as a young infantryman in a battalion on the Turkish border during a skirmish on the Sava, as the river flowing into the Danube is called, by wild Bashibozuks. In Turkish captivity he had to do hard work in a treadmill that irrigated the fields of a mountain. Apart from the work, he was not badly off, and was allowed to move freely in the small town of his imprisonment. Thus he met a young Turk of great beauty, but with a mark between his eyebrows, who took very kindly care of the poor prisoner and did him a lot of good without any reward. But as it often happens in the unsanitary regions there, Bogdan came down with the heavy misery or blood dysentery so that he became more miserable and weaker and could no longer eat any food. The young Turk cared for him faithfully and showed a lot of sorrow, often asking Bogdan whether he could be allowed to grant him a wish. And when it came to the last and Bogdan could hardly speak any more for weakness, he smiled and said to the Turk:

"As bad as I am, brother, I could be helped if I could drink from the colored glass that stands on my mother's table, from the plum brandy which is in our cellar in Zagreb."

Then the Turk went out the door. Bogdan became weaker and weaker, and he gave his soul to God. When not an hour had passed, the Turk entered the door again and carried in his hand the glass painted with colorful flowers which Bogdan's mother had filled with strong plum brandy and held it to the lips of the sick man. He drank and fell into a deep sleep. When he awoke, he asked for his savior. But no one seemed to know anything about him. In his dilemma he called Hodja, the Mohammedan priest, and told him what had happened to him and how strange it was that the Turk had traveled so many miles there and back in an hour. Then Hodja said:

"Know that your friend was an Ewli. One who has died and came back. Good to you, that you have a guide through the kingdom of Death!"

Bogdan recovered and in an exchange of prisoners came back to his homeland. And there his mother told him that on the day of his recovery, a stranger knocked on her door and asked for the colored glass and brandy. And without understanding she gave him both, and after a short time there was another knock at the window, the stranger stood and pushed the empty glass back to her and spoke:

"Rejoice, mother, your son returns!"

And so it happened. - This, Baron Dronte, is what the dying soldier told me this afternoon and asked me if it was a sin that in the hour of his

death he had thought so much on Ewli, his face and the red mark between his eyebrows.

I replied that he should rather turn his thoughts to the Lord Jesus. He was doing this with all his might, was Bogdan's answer, but the face of the Lord Jesus in his thoughts without his intervention took on the features of Ewli. I saw that the poor man was in agony of conscience, and yet he could not master this image. I comforted him and said that it was up to the Lord and Savior alone to decide in which form he would show himself to him. Then Bogdan smiled and said that it was now easy for him to go and that nothing could rob him of the hope of a further life.

I jumped up from the table. As if in a bright light, for a small moment I saw the connections of all the mysteries of my life. But quickly enveloping veils descended on an image that was not accessible to my ordinary senses.

"May I make a great request?" I asked.

"If it is in my power to grant it."

"Lead me to the dying man," I asked.

"So come," said the priest.

We went quickly to the little cottage at the end of the village. A reddish light pressed through the tiny, dim windows. We heard many people murmuring, and when we entered the low room, we saw several men and women kneeling in prayer.

In a meager bed lay an old man. His small, shriveled face stood out from a blue pillow and was surrounded by the glow of the dying candle burning at his head.

We approached his bed. The heavy eyes were glazed, his mouth was open.

I saw at once that this man, in his distress would no longer be able to answer the questions that were burning on my lips.

Then something incomprehensible happened.

Slowly, the staring eyes turned and looked toward me. In the face already marked by the paralyzing finger of death, there was a faint movement, a joyful smile played around the thin, sunken lips, and before we knew what was going on in the dying man, his upper body rose, his haggard arms stretched out toward me, and almost sobbing, the thin old man's voice came from out of his mouth:

"So you have come after all -- at last!"

Radiant joy flamed in his eyes, then his head fell back into the pillows, a gray shadow ran over his mouth and nose, his body stretched so that the bedstead creaked.

The clergyman stepped in and closed the eyelids with his hand.

"Rest now, thou faithful servant," he said softly. "Let us pray!"

We said the Lord's Prayer, and as we left the parlor, I felt everyone's eyes on me.

The deceased believed he had seen his friend, Ewli, in me.

The clergyman did not speak a word. When we were back in his comfortable room, he looked at me with uneasy eyes.

"It must have been the scar," he said to himself.

"What scar?" I asked in amazement.

"The red scar that is between your eyebrows, Baron Dronte. - No, no!" he cried suddenly. "Further brooding over these things would be called trying God! - If it is convenient for you I will show you your bedroom!"

I bowed my thanks and went with him.

When we were standing in the room I had been given, he took me by the shoulders with both hands and looked me in the face for a long time.

"Forgive me for my rude confusion!" he then said. "But I, an old man, have experienced too many incomprehensible and disturbing things. I myself am not able to solve the terrible riddles of providence. I want to be alone. Please don't be angry with me. I need to flee from the confusion of these mysterious incidents to a safe haven! In the faith in Him, who directs everything according to His high will, and in the peace of prayer."

"Pray for me, too, Reverend Herr", I asked with emotion.

Then I was alone. And restlessly I groped with the feeling that the mind was not able to bring me any help, to find the little portal within the dark wall that would lead to the truth.

But here and there, in the sleepless night, appeared a faint glimmer of foreboding - I could not grasp anything of that, which in the deepest and darkest depths of my soul approached.

A farmer, whom I had taken into my service with his team and asked for the most stately building in the entire area, assured me that it was Krottenriede Castle. But the road that led there was a two day journey through a thick forest and a horrible moor and was by no means safe. Not too long ago the Spillermaxe gang had lain in wait in the Damned Quarry and in Klosterholz near the road, and the poachers were not doing too well

either, and seldom gathered together, for example, to hunt a more spirited game than a deer or roebuck.

Also the priest, whom I clearly saw had kept watch through the night, warned me of the vast forest, where it was not safe. When I had made up my mind to leave, he took his leave visibly moved and commended me to the blessing of God, who would protect me from the false arts and deceitfulness of Satan. For after careful reflection he could not believe that God would want to use a Mohammedan monk or dervish to help a believing Christian, whom he recognized me to be.

I thanked him for the night's lodging and the food and urged the farmer, whose name was Görg Rehwang, to hurry, since I had every reason to fear that the little courage the man had would evaporate before the journey began. After I made sure that the mail coach driver would be able to travel home in the course of the day and was quite well, we drove into the middle of the forest.

By the crouched neck and the shy side glances, which Rehwang did to the right and left, I soon realized that his heart was in his pants, and it was not long before he half turned around and asked with a cheese-white face:

"Didn't you hear something, Herr?"

"Nothing," I said.

"To the right hand someone has made a whistle or I shall not be blessed!" he whispered, scratching his furry hair.

But nothing happened. It might have been a wild bird.

Then, however, when we reached a marshy area of heath he began to talk about the inn, in which we were to find accommodation for one night and which was called "The Ball Mill".

"Supposedly there were many a man there with heavy stones on their feet, without clothes and possessions, in the depths of the black moor waters, to the delight of crayfish, water beetles and eels." he babbled, his teeth chattering.

"Lord, how about we turn the foreheads of our nags to where we came from?"

I gave him no answer, and so he drove on with a deep sigh. The area was gloomy and sad. Between shimmering pools stood ancient and gnarled trees, covered with warts and goiters. Dead trunks and those peeled by lightning desperately spread their twisted serpentine arms. On water covered with a skin of thick green slime, lurked crippled willows, on which

hungry crows squatted. Trunks and branches were whitewashed with the droppings of the resting birds. Sometimes a duck would rise out of the reeds with a whistle and beating wings. Very distant, mournful notes from a flute purred in the wind, and gray misty women dragged their dripping gowns through the treetops.

"Here it's called the Damned Quarry", the farmer began again. "And the path there, between the young birches, leads to the Ball Mill, where we can spend the night."

But it went on for a long time, until we arrived in front of the dark gray and unfriendly building. Large, stone balls, green with moss, eaten by rain and snow lay next to the door, and a moldy soft spot still showed where the dammed waters of the moor brook had driven the mill, which had long since become an inn.

The farmer got off the wagon with a crooked back and shouted a few times:

"Hey there, the inn!"

But nothing moved, yet we thought we heard wild singing coming through the greenish windows behind the strong square bars. After long shouting the host finally appeared with a huge black and white spotted dog, whose dull, raw face was not unlike that of a man. The broad-shouldered man, who had an excessively long knife sticking out of his fat leather pants, looked at us unkindly enough and grunted:

"Hoho, Rehwang, what do you bring us there for a distinguished gentlemen?"

"The gentleman has a long way to go," the farmer apologized. "And so goes inquiry on account of the night's lodging."

"Still don't know the household custom, you living cow patty?" the rude host dug at poor Görg Rehwang. "And if the emperor and the pope and all the electors and as far as I'm concerned, also the empress and the archbishop's bed warmer come riding and driven, there is nothing else in the Ball Mill but a bundle of straw in the large room. - The Herr can do with it as he pleases!" he said with a treacherous look at me.

Behind him, pointy-nosed, shabby and rattle-thin like the forest crows on the garbage heap by the building, suddenly stood, as if grown from the earth, the landlady who smiled wryly and said:

"If it is convenient for the Herr he is welcome! While there is nothing but a poor man's bed, we have good wine and a company in the house,

where there is a great deal of fun."

"There is no lack of wine," the innkeeper in the woollen doublet interjected much more friendly. "I just wanted to warn the gentleman that he does not expect anything fine from us and does not beat the wheel in disgust at the burping and farting of the sleeping companions around him."

I did not reply to the coarse lout's rude speeches and entered the house. Roaring laughter and shouting rang out to me from the tavern when I opened the door, and stinging pipe smoke billowed out in clouds.

At the long table, above which was an elaborately carved in wood, six-horse carriage with all the accessories hung in toy size, also burned six or seven candles in tin lanterns. Three students sat at it, their long swords strapped around them, their sleeves pinned up, drinking Runda. With them was a tree-tall, gaunt fellow with a bald skull and a fiery red vulture nose, dressed in a scuffed black robe, who held a cheeky brown-skinned woman on his lap, with his hand waving a yellow neck cloth in the air. The black-eyed woman laughed in such a way that her exposed breasts trembled, and she pinched the old beau in his drunkard's nose, so that he cried out loudly and let her go.

Our entrance attracted noisy attention. Immediately they dragged Görg to the table and quickly brewed a mixture in a mug of beer, wine, spit and pipe juice, which he had to empty immediately as a toast to the well-being of the four senses. But me they mockingly addressed as "Your Honor" and asked if I did not know that one has to make three bows and a scrape of the foot when entering, such an illustrious group or if the fine gentleman felt like a few passes with the rapier. This I could have in a moment.

"Are you still acting so wild, Bavarian Haymon?" I asked and had to smile wistfully, when I recognized my old Order brother.

He sat there with his mouth open, as if he had been struck by a blow.

"I know you well," I said, stepping close to him. "Even if time has run away!"

"Pinch me, Hoibusch, pinch me!" he sputtered and nudged the student next to him. "A ghost stands before me-"

"Ei, what, a ghost!" said I. "its Mahomet and no other!"

Something like a pathetic joy was in me, that I saw him again, although degenerated and aged before his time. And on the lapels of his skimpy coat he still wore the letters of our secret slogan, artfully entwined from silver wire:

"Vivat circulus fratrum amicitiae!"

Long live the brotherly circle of the Order of Friendship.

I pointed with my finger and said smilingly:

"Vivat, crescat, floreat!"

Then he jumped up on both feet and shouted:

"Murderous hail of bombs! Stinking foxes, kneel down! An old Amiciste stands before you, Mahomet, who has wiped more blood from his thrusting blade than runs in your sour veins. O brother of heart! What a race has taken our place! Drinking from little cups, crying for their mothers when they run out of veal...and run into the lecture hall with their pens and notebooks. -O the old times! *O Amicitia!*"

He threw his long arms around me, kissed me resoundingly on both cheeks, and the tears trickled from his inflamed eyes.

"And now here, by my green side, Herr Brother, and that none open their mouth till Mahomet has told us about the best of his famous life experiences - Hey, Ball Mill Innkeeper, hey, Bärbel, jump and swing and bring as much wine as the table can bear. And the farmer shall join in the drinking!"

But he had gone out and was no longer to be seen.

The innkeeper now approached the table very politely and asked what we wanted. I looked at him with a certain horror. In his one eye was a false squint, the other lay as a white, blind glass ball between slitted eyelids. A fiery red cut scar, shaped like an 'S', ran across the bald skull, eye and the cheek, to the fat double chin. I knew that murderers marked traitors with such a cruel mark.

Soon there were large bowls of venison on the table along with flagons of wine on the table, and a wild carousing began, in which I participated with caution. My heart was loaded with feelings that had nothing to do with those of the people at the table, and I had enough to answer Haymon's questions. The three others were listening quite modestly and the girl looked at us like a cow at a new gate.

When the candles had burned down and Haymon's tongue grew heavier and heavier, I first learned how his life had turned out, how, when all his parents' property was gone, he had to be glad to be able to crawl under somewhere as a town clerk. And that was also the end since his hand was so shaky from the continued drunkenness that his squiggles were no longer legible. Now he had set out to find one of his former tenants who

had become rich, from whom he thought he could still claim something, however little it was, and while wandering he had met the three students today and continued together on the path with them. After a long wandering back and forth in the wild forest they had found the lonely Ball Mill about two hours before I arrived with Görg, and were glad to find a roof for the night, even more so, as a whizzing west wind brought up ever wilder clouds and the earth smelled of rain.

Now, however, the many wines had won Bavarian Haymon's heart completely and utterly, and with many gulps, belches and weeping he could not do enough to remember those wild times full of youthful foolishness and exuberance in the magical false light of memory, keeping the good and the pleasant, but completely forgetting the excess of adversity and bitter worries. And after each sentence he spoke, he let a new cup trickle down his skinny, knitted neck, while the three young students only dared to talk quietly in a whisper so as not to interrupt the dialogue of their mossy superior. I was hurting enough. Friendship and youth were gone.

"Strike and heavy death, Herr Brother!" He cried out one more time, "What kind of guys we were! Do you still remember the same night, how tall Heilsbronner gave up the ghost in the road dirt? How the brave Montanus emptied the glass boot into his gullet for the last time? O brother, Finch has also perished, drowned in the Murg, and the Portugieser has rotted alive in the Spittel in Erlangen, so badly did the Dancing Lily, with whom he had lived, make such a mess of him. And Wechler, I don't know if you would still know him, has become a cathedral lord and no longer acknowledges me. *O vanitas, vanitatum vanitas!* Gone are all the oaths and brotherly love! Hey, Bärbel! Where is that bitch in heat? Give me some light! Are we to remain in this hellish darkness? The three vixens have enough money to pay for several candles!"

Then the innkeeper came out from behind the tiled stove, where he had been lurking without our knowledge and said rudely and hoarsely that it was bedtime, and new candles had to be fetched from afar. Only a stump remained, and that was just enough to find the sleeping room.

One of the young boys wanted to say something but another one next to him, a quiet, nice boy who, as I had observed the whole time, had drunk almost nothing and was quite sober quickly nudged him and said softly, but in such a way that I could hear it:

"Quiet, Hans! We may yet need your candles!"

The lout of a landlord without further ado took the last candle, which was barely enough for a quarter of an hour, from the table and mumbled, "Now whoever wants to sleep, let him follow me. Who does not like it can squat in the dark room. Nothing more will be poured out!"

Haymon wanted to stay, but I quickly took him under the arm, and so we went behind the innkeeper and his big dog to find our resting place.

We walked through a long corridor with several thick, dusty or boarded-up windows. Haymon's intoxication came out as we walked, and I heard him say something about a goddamned town piper, who he wanted to wipe out.

Meanwhile I remembered that the farmer was not with us.

"Where is my driver?" I asked the innkeeper, whose giant shadow slid along the wall.

"Rehwang?" he grumbled, half looking around. "He's long since gone home with his harness."

"Why didn't you say anything?" I was annoyed. "What shall I do tomorrow?"

The hulking fellow stopped in front of a door and shrugged his shoulders.

"If the gentleman had drunk less and had paid attention to Rehwang, he could easily have kept him here. It's not my job to care about such things."

He threw a sidelong glance with his one-eye at me.

"And who knows if tomorrow will be so urgent."

I kept silent, and he pushed open a wooden door with his foot, holding his hand in front of the stump in the tin candelabra.

We entered and found ourselves in a large, completely empty hall, which had probably once been the pouring floor. In the middle of the room stood, oddly enough, a thick, round column, which supported the main beam of the ceiling on a wide annulus. Star-shaped around this column were five berths, better than we had thought. On clean, fresh straw were coarse, but white sheets laid down, hard against the pillar there was a head cushion for everyone, and five thick red-woolen blankets were spread out for covering.

"We don't have any better than this in the Ball Mill," said the innkeeper, as if embarrassed.

"The gentlemen must make do."

We testified that we were satisfied, and so he, smiling and bending down, put the burning light on a stool, showed us the little luggage that was ours, and under the evil growl of his mutt, wished us a good night. We heard him shuffle away through the hallway and then throw the heavy front door shut, sliding the bar and locking it with the turning of a key.

The two who had led Haymon so far now let him slide gently onto one of the beds, and it was not two minutes before he began to snore and mumble meaningless words, which the wine had given him. A frightening restlessness was in me, and some dark foreboding lay warningly and heavy in the pit of my stomach. I took the light and looked around. Sooty cobwebs hung like banners of mourning from the old beams of the ceiling; the three small windows with their blinded, lead-lined bull's-eye panes could not be opened. A choking musty cellar odor brooded in the wide room with the column. The wide ring it wore at the top had recently been whitewashed, so that it stood out glaringly against the lurid ceiling.

When I turned around, I saw that my feelings were shared by the three students. None of them made any preparations to visit the tempting beds or to put their swords away.

"It smells like old blood in here," said the bright-eyed Hoibusch, who had already impressed me with his sobriety and calmness at the table.

Also Hans Garnitter, who was lighting the candles said, "This is where the devil is supposed to spend the night!" and the third, a young gentleman of Sollengau, who gradually became free of the wine spirits, nodded apprehensively.

Since the candle threatened to go out, I asked Garnitter to come out with his treasures, and soon there was a new light burning in the candlestick.

"Hang cloaks or blankets in front of the windows, so that they do not see the light from outside," I admonished, and immediately they went to carry out the advice. In the meantime I looked at the door. There was probably a strong wooden latch on the outside, but there was no way to secure it from the inside. The hinges, however, seemed quite freshly oiled to me, and I brought it to the attention of the others.

"That bastard of an Innkeeper is up to something," the squire from Sollengau blurted out, "and because there are four of us, since the drunk is not to be counted, we must be hellishly on the watch, because the host can get help from the Spillermoxen Gang or from the blue whistlers."

I said nothing and continued my investigation. The floor was made of tamped earth, the walls had been built up with solid blocks and cement and were ancient, and the ceiling had no visible opening and consisted of heavy, dark beams, such as one can only rarely still find in such length and strength.

Then Hoibusch emitted a low whistle and beckoned me hastily. He was standing by the pillar. We trod on the rustling straw and followed his groping hand with the light. And there we saw something that revealed to us the trace of the satanic trickery that was at play here.

In its entire length, from top to bottom, the rough stone column was smoothly polished as if something heavy often slid up and down on it and transformed the roughness of the friction points into polished grooves. And seized by the same thought, we looked upward at the ring or the capital of the column, which with its excessive projection and mighty width enclosed the column. It stood out brightly white in its fresh coat of paint, and was separated from the narrow, circular space of the column itself, so that this heavy load, when it was loosened at the top, could fall down.

And it was precisely in the area of this ring that our head pillows were arranged around the column.

Haymon straightened up halfway in his sleep and stammered with wide-open eyes:

"Don't you want to rest, Montanus? - You can't get ducats from your Mary, brother - let go, put away the blue hand--" and then he vomited out the wine and food from his stomach, which had long since been ruined, and defiled himself nastily.

"Pull him away from this death-trap" I shouted.

Then they grabbed him by the legs and pulled him away from the dangerous bed, but he crawled back in his madness, while we continued and once again he was dragged away. Then he seemed to want to keep quiet and remained lying down.

"Shh!" whispered Garnitter, who was listening at the door.

We quickly extinguished the light and stayed as quiet as a mouse. Light footsteps came along the corridor.

"Bärbel, the false hussy -".

"Shh!"

She listened at the door, leaned. The wood creaked softly, Haymon chattered in his sleep.

"What say you of sulphurous flames, Portugieser? - Great hell, brother, how it stinks from your throat! I won't give you my hand, you are black all over, you devil- roast -".

Quietly she scurried away from the door, down the corridor.

We heard Haymon rustling in the straw, hitting the floor with his foot and stretching with a groan.

Footsteps again. The boys quietly drew their long blades; I drew the pistol, my thumb on the hammer, finger on the trigger, without cocking it. It coughed, scrabbled at the door. Then it slunk away again.

"They think they're safe now, the murderous hounds," said Hoibusch. On the ceiling above us something slid. A low rattle arose. A dull unintelligible voice spoke something. A whirring, a grinding, a whooshing fall--

Boom! - It struck heavy and pounding, softly muffled. Feet drummed like madly on the clay floor, leathery, clapping...- in our room.

"Strike fire, Hoibusch!" cried the squire hoarsely.

Pink, pink! The tinder glowed up, the sulfur- twitched blue and sizzled with acrid stench, the candle burned -.

"Almighty!" Garnitter wanted to cry out, but Hoibusch quickly put his hand over his mouth.

It took our breath away. The wide column ring had crashed down and buried the head cushions and the unfortunate head of poor Haymon, who had crawled back in the dark without our knowledge. His feet were spread apart, his hands were clasped on his chest in the robe and the rest of him lay under the murder stone. Like a thick, dark snake, glistening in the candlelight his blood coagulated in the straw.

"Lights out!" commanded the squire. "They're coming!"

Ready to strike, we stood on either side of the door in the darkness. Speaking loudly with echoing footsteps the landlord and his pointy-nosed wife came down the corridor and pushed open the door.

There they stood. The innkeeper carried in his left hand a large stable lantern, in his right fist a sharp axe, and the fury behind him was clutching a butcher's knife. We only saw them for a moment. Hoibusch's blade went through the guy, and Garnitter slit through the yellow neck of the woman, so that she fell down with the squeal of a stuck pig. The host was dead in an instant, speared through the heart like a starting boar. The woman was still wriggling, and then lay still on her side.

"Are you dead, bloodhound?" shouted Garnitter and kicked at the dead man's belly with his foot. Up in the house the dog howled.

"The dog! The wench!" cried Hoibusch. "We have to catch the wench; otherwise she will run away and send the host's henchmen after us!"

He and the squire set off with the lantern to look for the woman.

Now Garnitter and I saw the four holes in the ceiling and the ropes hanging, by which the stone could be pulled up again.

We set about freeing the dead Haymon. But the stone was too heavy for us to lift, and when we pulled on the feet of the murdered man, the bones of the crushed head crunched so horribly that we had to let go with a shudder.

Then we heard a shot, the wailing of the dog, and then a dragging and a whimpering, and immediately Hoibusch and the one from Sollengau came with the woman in shirt and smock, whom they had dragged out of bed, where she had been under the blankets and had fallen asleep. They had tied her hands with a calf rope.

"I am innocent," whined Bärbel when she saw us.

"Jesus Maria!" she shrieked out, as she stepped with her naked foot into the pools of blood in which the landlord and the landlady lay.

"Confess, whore, or we'll lay you down next to the two of them!"

Both!" said Hoibusch calmly. "Did you not set the dog on us? Confess, I say to you!"

"O thou bloody savior! What shall I confess?" Howled the strumpet and fell on her knees. "I have done nothing, except that I went to listen at the woman's command to see if everyone was asleep. I have never known of murder in my life".

"And what is this, you shamed woman?" cried Hoibusch in a strong voice and produced something he had been hiding behind his back. Stones and gold flashed - a necklace with almandines and artfully forged links shone in the light.

The girl's face was white with fear and she looked around with confused glances.

"Red!" said Hoibusch quite coldly, and put the point of the blade on her bare breast, so that a small little red drop sprang up.

"Ouch! Mercy -" clamored Bärbel as she squirmed to and fro. "From the lady in the cellar -".

Then she fell down in convulsions, and foam poured out of her mouth. It was a pity to look at. But Hoibusch remained unmoved.

"You have learned your art of eye-rolling well, you robber whore!" he said. "Stop making foam out of saliva, and get up!"

And once more he tickled her with the point of his rapier. Then, in spite of her tied hands, she sprang to her feet like a cat and cried out in despair:

"Well, if that's what it is, I'd rather be dead right now than let the gallows man sound me out with the thumbscrews!"

And she made such a swift and violent push against the drawn blade, so that it missed going through her body by a hair. But Hoibusch was on guard, and immediately let go of the handle, so she only slashed her shirt so that her dark breast bulged out.

"To the pillar with her!" cried Garnitter, and the three students dragged her there in spite of biting and shrieking, and bound her by body and legs next to the dead Haymon, so that they could remain in silent and terrible company. For we took the lantern with us and left the room with its sweetish haze of blood, leaving only the candle burning as a death light for the deceased. As we stood in the corridor, we heard the shrill screams of the tied up woman.

And I must confess it: I took pity on her, because I felt that it was not only her fault that she had to become like this. Surely an evil fate had clawed at her from childhood; an unguarded youth, instincts unleashed at an early age, abuse, which one with her child body already suffered, poverty, misery and lack of love did a terrible work on her. Was I allowed to judge, when I opened the abysses of my own soul? But as clever as the three students were, and as good as the heart of one or the other might be, at this hour and in view of the poor dead they would have looked at me with disgust if my thoughts had become spoken aloud, and I would not have helped anyone. So I kept silent and mourned in silence how wrong people's customs are, and how thousands and thousands of children grow up without any care. And not only the brood of the poor people --. How had it been with myself?

Tiredly I groped behind the others, who had the bunch of keys from the innkeeper's belt and now climbed into the cellar. In the hallway lay, big as a calf, the dog shot by Garnitter. Behind empty wine barrels and other

junk we found an iron door, discovered the key on the key ring and opened it - rusty dust flew into our eyes - but, good heavens! What was this?

All four of us jumped back in horror.

There were probably twenty corpses, brown, dried up, withered, eaten by rats, stripped of all their clothes. And on their shoulders they carried wide-squeezed disks with mouth gaps, hair tangles, jumbled white teeth. One could see an ear, a lower jaw, which was pressed up to the empty eye sockets, a worm-like black tongue that stretched sideways, clenched hands, blood crusts, splintered bones --

We rumbled up the stairs, ran out of the house and sat down on the mossy stone balls, breathing deeply, and the rain trickled down on us.

In the east it shone drearily. When it became quite light, we fed the fat horse of the innkeeper with oats and hay, and then harnessed him.

Before that, Hoibusch had looked in on the girl. She hung with twisted eyes as if fainted in the ropes. - Then they climbed up into the innkeepers' bedroom, rummaged in cupboards and chests and found a whole hoard of gold and silver coins, jewelry, precious garments, fine linen and weapons of all kinds.

In the meantime, I crept into the chamber of horror. The girl was awake, and her face was shining with tears. Silently I went there and cut the ropes with the landlady's knife, which I had picked up, cut the ropes in such a way that she herself could untie herself.

"Wait until you hear us leave," I said, "and then see to it that you save yourself -." A glow of hope passed over her decayed face, in which, despite all the depravity, showed the harmless child of old.

"Gracious Herr-" she stammered.

"Be silent and do not stir until we are gone. Perhaps that you may become honest again, girl. I dare on it!"

"Every day I will pray to God for thee, Lord," she whispered, "that he may have mercy on you as you have had on Bärbel -".

Quickly I went out.

I asked the three boys, as they came out of the house to leave me out of the game, since I had important things to do at Krottenrieder castle and the court could ruin all my plans.

It was all right with them, and since the way to the town would certainly pass by the castle, we traveled with each other through the dull morning toward the army road, the shivers of the night in all our limbs.

"With all my heart I pity the young blood on the column," said Garnitter after a while. "She is not at all guilty of any serious crime, and even if she came to listen, because she had to, and one or the other prey fell into her lap.

"What are you babbling about?" Hoibusch said and he struck at the lame gray horse. "One can see that you are a windy philosopher and know nothing of legal matters. I know the Roman law as well as the famous Carpzov enough to already know today the judgment that she will and must be given. And besides, I know myself to be of one mind with Baron Dronte and the Sollengau -".

"There is also a *jus divinum*, and of that you are obviously ignorant. Of course, it has nothing to do with scholarship, and has no paragraphs and subtleties and is better to be found in simple-minded people than in those who, like peacocks, have a green-gold wheel to beat, but have a nasty, inhuman voice," Garnitter replied.

"Are you trying to cheat me?" asked Hoibusch and pulled back on the reins.

"No fighting, gentlemen," I admonished. "Let us rather be grateful to Providence, which has saved us from death."

"This is also my opinion!" agreed the squire.

Thus peace was restored, and the Philosopher shook hands with the jurist.

But no matter how often we tried to turn the conversation to more pleasant things, again and again the terrible night came to our minds and the danger from which we had escaped, but from which the unfortunates in the cellar and our companion, Haymon, the last Baron of Treidlsperg, had fallen victim to.

Around noon we met on a heath, which lost itself into the forest, an old shepherd with his herd and asked for the way that led to Krottenriede castle.

"The gentlemen have to drive far around there," said the old man and stroked his wolfhound. "Or else get down from the wagon and take the narrow forest path on the right hand. It goes straight to the castle, whose sheep I herd."

Then I quickly climbed down from the wagon, took my coat bag and shook hands with the good fellows who had brought me this far, wishing them all the best in their lives. Garnitter, however, I looked especially into

the eyes; at first I liked Hoibusch the best when I entered the Ball Mill, but now because of the kindness of his heart, I was sorry that I had not talked to him a few more times.

Once again, I asked them to let me, who had neither had to make use of a gun nor had I been harmed, keep silent to the courts, that I was involved in other matters that were extremely important to me.

They promised me cordially and then drove on and went to fetch the courtiers, to clean out the robber's nest and to arrange for Christian burials for the lamentable corpses in the cellar, and also to redeem Haymon from the death stone and bury him as well.

As I turned to go, Hoibusch stood up in the carriage and shouted:

"Baron Dronte, I have sensed that you are on the side of the philosopher, and that out of love for you, I want to turn it so that Bärbel gets away from the tower and keeps her life!"

I waved back at him and slowly went my way.

But then I had to sit down under the trees and cry. I cried for the Bavarian Haymon and about our young years—.

The path I had taken on the advice of the shepherd was an old, dilapidated horse path, which led quite steeply uphill. In places, falling water and landslides had torn away many meters, and I had to, badly hindered by the coat bag, climb over the steep clay slopes. But the higher I got, the better the climb became, because all kinds of bushes and alluvial forest strengthened and thus protected the path from destruction. The hike lasted long enough, and it was getting late when I reached the uppermost part of the moderately high castle. After a bend in the path I stood unexpectedly before castle Krottenriede, where I longingly hoped, I would finally be granted an audience with Ewli.

But if there was something even sadder, neglected and gloomier than the Ball Mill, it was this castle. A monstrous, gray stone box with formerly red-white-red shutters, now faded, peeled off and crooked on their hinges, it stood between disheveled, thorny, mighty poplars and two ponds with brown, putrid water, which was overgrown by poison-green lentils. On the steep, damaged roof was a weather vane bent by the storms and eaten by verdigris- representing an upright lion. Part of the window panes were gray with dust, other parts had only jagged shards in the rotten frames. A large pile of garbage, in which broken bottles, scraps of clothing, rags, bones and ashes were mixed together, piled up not far from the main entrance, a

pointed arched gate, over which a Moor's head was carved as a coat of arms, in one eye of which was an arrow. Since no one was to be seen, I entered the castle courtyard and was immediately attacked by a pack of spotted hounds. But before the wild males could quite snap at me a silent young man with a sullen wrinkled face appeared and whipped them into their stone kennel, whose torn down iron grille had been replaced and strengthened with a couple of heavy stones leaning against it. I saw that both of his ears had been smoothly cut from his head.

I was about to turn to him, but out of a gate a huge, fat, white-haired man with a red face and a glowing nose approached me and gruffly asked for my name and desire.

I named myself, and his face became immediately cheerful. He held out his hand to me and shouted loudly while he shook my right hand:

"What?" "How? A Dronte? Melchior Dronte, perhaps even the son of my old crony and Willow comrade?"

When he then learned the name and last place of residence of my dead father, he embraced me, blew his warm, wine-scented breath into my face and shook me by the shoulders.

"My lord Baron, I rejoice to the depths of my eighty-year-old hunter's soul to get to know you. Your godly father was a hunter *comme il faut*, and there will not be many more like him in these shitty times. Ei, how the time goes by, and now I get to know Melchior, whose birth we celebrated with champagne from the big ducal silver cup, called the "Sauglocke", and look, this child, whom I saw with wet panties already has gray hair at the temples. But what is the reason? Has the skinny hunter already put the bullet in the barrel, in order to lay an old deer on my blanket? So let's be happy my Lord Baron, and commemorate the knightly days of which your name reminds me so fiercely."

I thanked him, strangely and not pleasantly moved by the fact that he had been my father's friend. Even the morose man who was missing his ears and who was now ordered to find a place for me to stay somewhere in the castle, did not make me feel very cheerful.

"But now I want to introduce myself formally," said the old gentleman and stood up straight in his green coat. "I am the Master of the Hound of the erstwhile Duke of Stoll-Wessenburg, Eustach von Trolle und Heist, and I have been sitting here for twenty years among crows and owls, with a small salary on Krottenriede. We hadn't a thought at the time squire,

not a single thought, your Herr Father and I, as we held Serenissimo's head when the wine was about to run out for those at the top."

We walked up and down the cool arcade of the manor courtyard, and I saw, with a tormenting restlessness in my heart, and indifferently looked at the hundreds of wooden carved deer heads, boar's tusks and deer antlers on the walls, from which long spider threads hung and swallow's nests stuck. On the floor lay almost hairless wolf-pelts and worn deer blankets, which gave the impression of decay and abandonment even more. And the old man next to me was Heist, of whom my father had told me that he had killed the duke's court poet in a duel, and of whom Gudel had spoken of with disgust.

"Well, well!" said the Master of the Hound, standing still and stuffed a pinch into his fiery nose.

"*Mort de ma vie*, you are not a child, after all, Dronte, and it will not offend you when I tell you that your father and I were the best sire stallions at court. Isn't it still told today the fun of how we stood one of the chambermaids of the duchess on her head and filled the woman with champagne so that Serenissimus almost suffered a stroke from laughing? Or how we pinched the hopeful Annemarie Sassen in the dark on her firm arse, so that she cried for help and the duchess swore to have the culprits publicly flogged, even if they were of standing? Oh, those were good times, wild days! What do you youngsters know of them?!"

To distract him from those wild memories, which reminded me in a terrible way of all the suffering that had come to me from my father, I asked him about the man with the missing ears who had been sent to find a shelter for my person.

"Him?" laughed the old man. "That's a former magister, who went about all over the place and also came to the court of the grand lord. And there it seems to have gone wrong for him, for they cut off his ears at the bridge of Stambul. He has lived here for several years and provides me with board, lodging and a few pennies, but he is kept quite short."

Just at that moment the man had silently appeared behind us; a sour smile on his disgruntled face told me that he had heard the words of the hound master. But then he said, dryly and without any raising and lowering of his voice, to his master:

"Accommodation is found, my lord, Master of the Hound. In the hall of the former patrimonial court, the ceiling is tolerable and impermeable, in

case of new rain. The bedding is with sufficient linen, the windows are washed and quite clean. The foreign master can dwell there, if -- if namely--
"

"Don't be so long in talking about "if" and "when, but tell him what the catch is!" the octogenarian snapped at him."You educated ass!"

The grumpy one didn't make a face at this.

"Provided the gentleman is not afraid of ghosts that sometimes haunt such old chambers."

"Triple-horned dromedary!" rumbled the hound master. "Just so it stays in the courtroom! What's for dinner?"

"Venison with four kinds of brawn, boiled blue tench with millet porridge and a nutmeg tart," said the magister.

"Good. Now get back to your writing!"

The gray man walked away with his back bent.

"You don't treat the poor man very well," I couldn't help from saying.

"That's how you must deal with such learned dicks or else they'll be ridden by conceit and arrogance," laughed Troll. "Believe me, Dronte, no one needs to be put down more and castigated than the learned rabble who stir up the common folk and make them dissatisfied with us. But now I will show you your chamber - a rascal who gives more than he has!"

As we ascended the stairs, he asked me, as it were, if I had any business in the area, and when I said that I hoped to meet someone here whom I had not been able to identify, he was satisfied and said that I could remain as a guest as long as I wished, for he had plenty of food and wine.

Then he showed me the door of my room and reminded me to be on time for the meal.

With a disconsolate heart I entered the wide room, in which I now had to stay in uncertainty and wait for Ewli. The manner of the old man was extremely repugnant to me, and the form in which he finally offered his hospitality with reference to the abundance of the food, seemed to me so hurtful that I would have preferred not to unpack my coat bag at all. Also I was dreading the constant togetherness with the hearty, by his age by no means internalized man, and it was completely incomprehensible to me that Ewli should have chosen this very place to come close to me. Tormenting doubts came over me and aroused in me the thought that I had turned in the wrong direction and could have missed the actual place. But now I had to

good or bad, be satisfied and hope that the man from the Orient would also know how to find me here, if this would be in his mind.

Since I would be in the spacious room later I hardly took any time to look around the barely illuminated and gloomy chamber. I also found no light, so I hurried with makeshift cleaning in a metal basin, into which I let water bubble from a hanging dolphin by means of a faucet, and then went down to the dining room.

The hall was a reflection of all the misery in the old stone box. In one corner a part of the wall covering had fallen down and formed a pile of rubble that no one seemed to have been obliged to clear away. The darkened ancestral portraits of the counts of Treffenheid, to whom the coat of arms of the arrow-headed Moor belonged, looked with white, staring eyes from the wall, and in a once beautiful, but badly damaged dragon fireplace blazed, despite the warm day, a huge fire made of beech logs. At the large, heavy table I sat next to the hound master in the midst of all the dogs, who were eating chunks of meat and pieces of cake and biting each other, and at the very end of the table like a gray shadow squatted the unfortunate Magister Hemmetschnur. Such was his name, the peculiarity of which still elicited a guffaw from old Heist, when he pronounced it, twisted and misshapen in all ways. But the food was good, and even if the wine in the pewter cups was a bit tart, it nevertheless pricked pleasantly on the tongue and palate.

After the meal, which proceeded rapidly, the dogs were driven out, and the old man lit one of the many lime pipes, which were placed in front of him, stuffed in a cup. When he had smoked one out, he threw it, breaking it in shards, and grabbed the next one, so that we were soon sitting in a thick blue fog, watching the ever coughing figure of the gray clerk almost disappear in the haze.

I was tired and sad, and also exhausted from the terrible adventure in the Ball Mill and yet out of courtesy had to stay and listen to the coarse jokes and jests of the master of the hound, which were never ending and to show me a picture of my father, with whom he had committed a large part of his deeds, that was even more ugly and unpleasant than it already was in my memory. But since the old man drank intemperately, his tongue soon became heavy. When the eleventh hour struck, he opened his mouth wide and began to shout out songs with a false and booming voice:

"A little rabbit would creep" and "It runs to the wood unharmed, fellow," and so on, without pausing, until at last his bald head sank with a

jerk on his chest and out of his open mouth came a sawing snore and a rattle. As if this had been awaited, immediately two powerful hunters and a hunter boy entered, grabbed the hound master by the head, shoulders and feet and carried him out without bothering about me or the mute magister. Although curiosity was far from me, I did nevertheless address a few questions to the man who had been treated so disdainfully, and who seemed to me to be worthy of some attention, and I learned that every day at the same time the intoxication and singing began. And this had its origins in the fact that years ago, between eleven and half past midnight, the wife of the master of the hound had found her husband in the arms of a maid and became so transformed that she was killed on the spot by a stroke. Sometimes, however, the ghost of the Duke of Wessenburg's court poet, who had been killed by his hand, would appear. This was the reason why the old man tried to drown out this period of time.

If no one is present, the old man sings alone, but then, before eleven o'clock, the head hunter Räub must appear with his hunting horn and stay until the moment he falls asleep, and then blow the horn as loud as he can. After this explanation, Hemmetschnur seized one of the candlesticks with five candles and asked for the honor of escorting me to my bedchamber.

We climbed through the dead quiet house, around which the wind whined and the poplars rustled, onto the upper floor, and in front of my door the magister gave me the light, humbly bowed and wished me a good night.

"Tell me still, Herr Magister, what you meant when you spoke of a haunting in this room?"

I stopped him. At the same time I opened the door and invited him to enter the room with me.

He bowed and closed the door behind us, a smile sliding across his grizzled gray face.

"Certain things I cannot say," he said, looking around. "But consider what may have gone on in this chamber for all the uncounted years, since the *jus gladii* and the jurisdiction of it all rested on Krottenriede. People say many things. Like for example, that old Krippenveit, whom they torqued to death here, sometimes lifts the trap door in the floor and looks around horribly.

Or that the horse Jew Aaron, whom they wanted to tickle for his money, suddenly stood in a dark corner screaming for mercy. They tortured

him here, too, and because he was over seventy years old, when they raised him, he fell into the fainting sleep of the tortured, they put boiling hot eggs into his armpits and pressed them with their arms to get the gold hiding place from him. But he would rather have died than have given it away, *Emmes gedabert*, as they call it in their language, truth-talking. Up there is still the iron ring on the ceiling, through which the rope ran. Here they also had the Bee's Agnes, also called the honey lick, brought to a confession and then handed her over to the redcoat, who burned and roasted her and then buried her at the cemetery of Saint Leodegar with a black cat and an old hen that would not leave her. The Frau of Weinschrotter however, a woman of nobility, who grew roses and lilies from her pots in the bitter winter, was sentenced to the sword. Her portrait hangs here in the room. You Baron, can see the crudeness and stupidity of the people that has been celebrated in this room. From the futile sighs and tears of the poor, who fell into the hands of these animals and of the abominable events that have taken place here, a shadow or image may still adhere to the cursed walls, and for those predisposed or through special arts those events may appear as alive once again to suitable persons. That is what I meant."

"I will venture on it," I said.

"You, a person of noble heart, will not be harmed by the room, although --" he faltered and bit his lips.

"Although?" I pressed him.

"I, Baron, would not like to sleep here, and if there were only one other place in the house, where it does not trickle in by the ceiling or blow through empty window holes, I would have chosen it for you rather than this damned courtroom! But now I wish you a restful night!"

He bowed low and left.

I was alone, and took the candlestick to look around.

The wide chamber had been decorated with precious leather wallpaper, which was now, of course, everywhere damaged and tattered on the wall. It showed in hundredfold the Treffenheid coat of arms with the Moor's head, which had an arrow shaft sticking out from the eye. Under it on a ribbon was to be read the heraldic motto:

"One dies - another lives."

In the corner next to the door stood a two-sleeper four-poster bed with twisted columns and angels' heads, the gilding of which was worn away. At the lead-framed windows, which had small gaps, the pale moon wandered

behind wisps of clouds, and a withered, broom-like poplar treetop sometimes poked at the rickety panes. A table and a few chairs had just been put there for me, as could be seen from the dust on the floor.

More remarkable than all this, however, were two large paintings, which were next to each other on the wall, separated by a horizontally stretched out naked human arm, extending from a red sleeve which, was holding a simple executioner's sword.

I approached the paintings with the light. The first one was rich in small figures, and I had to look for a long time in the restless candlelight until I recognized a procession on the dark canvas, which was leading the sinner in a cart with solemn seriousness to the place of execution. Under the picture, on a white background, it read:

"If you have patience in pain,
It will be very useful to you,
Therefore give yourself willingly to it."

The unknown painter had understood it, and painted into the faces of the accompanying persons, secretly and immediately recognizable to everyone, stupidly proud dignity, thoughtlessness, malice, cruelty, indifference, and cowardly contentment; but from the face of the man on the execution cart cried out fear, and the staring look was almost a longing for the final redemption by the redcoat, who stood tiny and distant on the scaffolding.

This image made me fall into a depth of consciousness or foreboding, which filled me with fearful darkness for several minutes. It told me that something had happened or was about to happen, and from my soul a voice spoke barely audibly:

"I know ---."

The roots of my hair were on fire, drops of sweat covered the inside surface of my hands. But what it was, I could no longer grasp with my mind, for as quickly as it came, it sank again into a dark abyss. I turned my gaze from the terrible image, ducked under the threatening sword arm, so as not to touch it, and lifted the light towards the other painting.

A fine and cutting stab went through my heart. This face, blissful and childlike, with reddish shimmering braids under a small hood, with the delicate nose and the small mouth, with the curved eyebrows, it was...

"Aglaja," I whispered softly, and the heavy candlestick almost fell from my hand.

But then it seemed to me as if a sad, dark glow went over the lovely face. No, not Aglaja! It was Zephyrine who was looking at me, as if she were breathing. The slender hand, coming from a lace ruff, wore a silver ring of woven serpentine bodies with a fire opal and held daintily between pointer finger and thumb were three crimson roses and a snowy lily. But what was written underneath, confused me in the face, which always showed a beloved face. I ran my hand over my eyes and read the characters under the painting:

*Likeness of Lady Heva Weinschrötter,
Canoness to St. Leodegar, accused of sorcery
and sentenced to the sword
In the year anno 1649.*

And then I stood for a long time, until the candles began to crackle and the wax dripped. - What was appearance and what was truth? The night had passed quietly except for some creaking and cracking in the room and in the floor as is natural in such old buildings.

The new day was of dull light and unfriendly, full of wind and falling drops. There was a rustling in the walls, as of rats.

The servant, who brought my breakfast, informed me that the master of the hound was suffering from gout and would not be visible before the evening. I should not enter uninvited into his room, because he had a saddle pistol next to him loaded with rock salt and pig bristles, and in his piercing pain he was well able to burn one on me and everyone, as he had already done to magister Hemmetschnur once before.

So I looked once more in the gloomy light of the room, at the ruined face which was now even more clearly visible than in the candlelight. I also discovered the trapdoor in the floor, through which one could enter the dungeons and chambers under the earth. And whatever I did, the gray eyes of the painting of Lady Heva Weinschrötter followed me. But as I, mindful of the evening's feelings, looked firmly and attentively at the rosy face under the gold hood, it seemed to me strange and distant to me. The resemblance to Aglaja-Zephyrine faded into the distance and finally disappeared completely.

While wandering around in the spacious chamber I discovered opposite my bed a door so carefully fitted into the wallpaper that it was easy to miss. When I pushed its creaking hinges, I came into a narrow chamber with racks, in front of which were rotten curtains of shot green damask, all covered with dust. When I pushed them aside, I found in the compartments whole bundles and piles of old files, and all sorts of formerly confiscated *corpora delicti*, such as knives, hatchets, bludgeons, rotten wheel locks, thieves' hooks, gypsy casting rods and the like, and attached to each item was a carefully written note. Some I read:

"The knife, with which Matz from the Schellenlehen stabbed Schieljörg," and "Explosive and grenade called, Reb Moische, the Hendl from Poland". Finally I came to an earthen, smoky pot, blue-glassed, which was tightly tied with a pig's bladder and on the square parchment on the handle, was written in brownish faded ink:

"Numerus 16. Flying or witch ointment, found under the bed of the lady of hell, and dug out of the earth."

This relic of one of the women who had stood here during the inquisition, aroused my curiosity very much, and I hid it near my bed, in order to visit it later.

At the midday meal, only the magister appeared, who asked me politely about the night spent and then said that I was the first to have been granted a quiet sleep in this room. After the meal I went for a walk with him despite the rain showers and gusts of wind, and talked to him. The knowledge of this man was astonishing, his exact knowledge of languages, and I could not help but ask him, how he, with his erudition, could not have found anything better than that of his unworthy clerical services for the old master of the hound, who seemed to take special pleasure to humiliate and make fun of his education in front of others.

He heaved a deep sigh and said that if he only had enough money so that he could reach the city of Paris, or only to Strasbourg in the former German land, which the French had stolen, it would be better for him in an instant. There he would have friends who would gladly continue to take care of him. But even if he had as much as he needed for the journey, he would still have to be on his guard. For the master of the hound, as he said, had already impudently threatened him, the magister, and would not refrain from accusing him of embezzlement and to have him punished, which he,

as a poor and helpless man, was unknown and without any ability to defend himself.

I said nothing, but made up my mind, to help this unjustly tormented person, if I could.

For dinner, the gentleman from Trolle and Heist was brought to the table in a carrying chair, his right foot bound thickly and sweating with pain. It was hardly possible to hold a conversation with him, and only in view of the fact that I had to stay here at all costs, I allowed myself to be subjected to various of his quarrelsome and irritable moods. It was worse with the magister than with me, he threw a pig's bone at his head for no reason and as for the hunters who were waiting for him, he would spit wine at them or hit them with a stick. At ten o'clock he began to drink murderously again, and at about eleven he started his howling anguished chant. But the intoxication did not work this time, and I saw how he looked in fear with puffy eyes into the corner of the chamber devastated by the fall of the wall. Finally- he hurled a heavy mug in the direction of the apparition visible to him, laughed, and then sank down, muttering to himself several times something about a useless rhyme smith and court poet, and then sank into a frenzied sleep, whereupon they lifted him up in the carrying chair and carried him away.

"Hell! Hell!" groaned Himmetschnur and ran his hands through his wild hair. "If only I could get away from here!"

I said good night to him and went to my room.

By the light of the burning candle, I searched for the lady of hell's little pot and cut with the knife around the rock-hard, dried-up bladder. Inside was a crisscrossed, cracked greenish-brown substance. This may have been an ointment, but the excessively long time had made it firm and brittle. I thought that perhaps the candle flames might warm it up enough for it to take on more or less its old consistency, and so I held the blue jar over my candlestick. The melting stuff stank disgustingly of old fat and pungent herbs, but I gradually managed to soften the sediment, so that I could investigate the ointment and test its magical nature.

In the glow of my five wax candles I saw again the gray eyes of the Lady of Weinschrötter, who appeared to smile in amusement at my cheeky beginning.

"Shall I not?" I addressed the painting. But neither an answer nor a sign came from the now lifeless painting, which yesterday had greeted me

with a now vanished resemblance that had frightened me to my very soul.

Was it the heat of the candles or the vaporous fat and poisonous herbs that made me behave in this way: a flying heat, which I had already felt in the afternoon during the walk, came over me, and when I undressed, I felt how leaden my limbs were. My blood pulsed in rapid throbbing as if a fever were near.

Nevertheless, I remained stubbornly determined or forced by something to stick to my plan to try the ointment. I took off my shirt, spread the stuff on my chest, belly, hands, feet and forehead, as I had learned from the horror stories, that old Margaret had told me in childhood, and still remembered the witch's spell:

"Out the top and nowhere on!" laughed at myself for my silliness, blew out the candles, and lay down in the creaking four-poster bed.

The blood rang in my ears, a tingling sensation ran through my limbs. I saw the half moon in the window, which I had forgotten to close.

And then I slowly sat up in bed, slipped out from under the low canopy and floated between the ceiling and the floor, without me finding this strange. I had often flown like this in my dreams, with casual movements of the arms or some footsteps to steer the flight. But I now saw myself lying in bed, illuminated by the blue moonlight. Open-mouthed with two sharp wrinkles in my face, that went from my nostrils to my chin as the result of some evil experience. I saw the extinguished candles with the long scrolls, the bare cleaning scissors, and my robe on an upholstered chair, the open hair bag. I was amazed at nothing, nor was I startled when Lady Heva Weinschrötte- cautiously climbed out of the picture frame and floated out through the open window. I kicked the air with a feeling of well-being, like a swimmer treads the water that carries him. All of them followed after Heva. An old Jew with a caftan, another one, whose white, scabby skull peered out of the raised trapdoor, a hunchbacked woman with a snuffy nose and eternally smacking mouth, and with a black tomcat that sat on the hump and a white, lame little dog that was running after her, another ugly, goggle-eyed woman, who sneaked to my bed, hissed at the resting body and with crooked fingers reached for the little pot to quickly lubricate her yellow, wrinkled skin. And then in infinite well-being I turned to the open window and flew in an instant over the bent and wind-shredded poplars, full of joy at the regained skill of flying.

At will, I ascended with a very light hand and foot stirring up and down, shooting light as a feather upwards or slowly downwards, turned immediately, let the air carry me horizontally or sank like a rock, just as I liked. Nevertheless, it continued like that without me being frightened, and I drifted like a flying feather before the wind. Even if I remained motionless, I saw beneath me tree tops, reflecting water, meadow surfaces and lonely little houses gliding past. But this did not worry me at all; rather I surrendered with full pleasure to the bliss, liberated from the weight of the body and floated through the silvery moon light like a cloud. Also I made no steering movements any more, but gave myself completely to such bliss of an earth-liberated state.

Then, however, I saw closer and more distant figures in the milky air, on the same path as me, gently drifting and hovering like old wives' summer. Young women with white and golden brown limbs, with loose hair and willingly naked, their eyes closed as if in sleep, their arms spread out; but in between also bony and shapeless hags, then again fat ones with sagging and flabby fullness, scrawny old women, disgustingly hairy and coarse male figures, slim-limbed girls with weakly curved breasts, beautiful boys and skinny, miserable bodies of gaunt old men. However, as soon as I made an effort to focus more sharply on a face, it became a vague round egg of whirling mist and dissolved. But even that did not put me in fear or astonishment. Rather, everything had long been familiar and quite right, as if I had experienced and seen this many times. And effortlessly, I was blown, through the will-less, delicious detachment of my own limbs and the lightness of my body, by the air between clouds, moon, stars which drew me toward the friendly tugging of the earth deep below.

I sank. The figures gathered more densely around me.

I went down into the depths, gently sinking. A pale glow dazzled. Lights bounced beneath me, bluish and yellow lights. Faces with slanting eyes and flaring scoops of fire. And there was fire everywhere.

Between bushes and grass there was a swarming and jumping, a twisting and turning of innumerable figures that surrounded me. Some squatted in rigid clusters around red-yellow brushwood flames, murmuring in swelling, nasal song from books, keeping the beat with their hands. A brown boy with pointed ears, handsome and cheeky, round-hipped like a woman, was chasing a black, bearded shaggy goat with wild heel kicks through the midst of couples, who were twisting in spasmodic entwinement

as they rolled in the leaves. Gray wolves whose dark sweat dripped from their muzzles crept with glowing red eyes between beautiful, naked women. A crippled man without legs pushed with agile monkey arms the rest of his body through the tumult in a wheelchair and looked out of long distended eyes like those of a crab. One, whose skin stretched like parchment over the fleshless bones, blew squawking on a hollow leg bone, while glow worms crawled around in his eye sockets. A dwarf's body consisted of a bagpipe, and the purring and humming pipes protruded from the back of his trousers, while the trunk-mouth blew into the air tube and the twisted fingers of his hands wandered over the indecent flutes. A row of gray-toothed women with dangling tits danced hand in hand in circles around these musicians.

"Are you here too? Hussah!" There was a bellow next to me, and when I looked, Montanus had just passed by, and his belly was hanging red like glowing iron from the inflated trousers. More and more new dance groups formed. I saw legs from which the skin was hanging in shreds and laughing mouths, out of which white and yellow worms crawled. Dissolute children with disgustingly twisted eyes were writhing in the arms of hermaphrodite creatures, women cried out ruthlessly and dragged giggling, skinny boys to their steaming wombs, from goat udders fat milk ran into the toothless mouths of old men. One with broken, buckling limbs led another, who, leaden-grey faced, had a rope around his neck and displaying a monstrous manhood stumbled forward to a black-haired woman who was shrieking and twitching and rolling. Flames danced and shot pointedly out of the earth, and from out of a bush in front of me rose the deathly sad, pale face of the Bavarian Haymon with the crushed red nose, and his mouth whispered:

"Take some advice and see that you will come again, Mahomet!"

There arose a tremendous shouting, whooping and wild singing. They waved with their hands, their legs flailing and jerking against a high black stone block, on which, in the wavering, uncertain light, a figure was crouched, his knees drawn up to his chin, angular and silent.

I stared at it and recognized with raging horror Fangerle.

As if fused to the rock, he squatted there, his evil, pinched face under the big peasant hat glowed like rotting wood, and his long-hunters coat glowed in all its buttonholes, as if blue fire was hidden under them. The piercing goat eyes were directed straight at me, full of indescribable malice.

And then he uttered the horrible scream that Heiner had in front of the wheel.

"I-i-i-ilih!"

A thousand arms, fingers, claws and nails stretched out towards me. I wanted to rise quickly into the free kingdom of the air, but they hung on to my feet, pulled me down.

"Catch him! Stop him!" shrieked Satan on the block.

Desperately, I kicked my feet and flailed around. But new ones came, arms of women wrapped heavy and soft around my neck, hot lips pressed sucking against my face, claws tore at my hair; heavy masses clung to me, squeezing out my breath. I could no longer get up, saw in deathly fear the yellow goat eyes stare, the saw teeth bared, paralysis was like tough dough around my limbs, my heart was hammering, close to bursting, my breath caught, choking my throat.

"Lord, my God!" I cried out in deathly peril.

Then the hand of Fangerle grabbed me and flung me high into the air. Scornful laughter rang out behind me, neighing. The fires went out in the deep night, shadows flitted. Whirled, it whistled in the air, cried, screamed, howled ---.

I lay in my shirt in the middle of a wet meadow. Coldness was in my bones, and yet my body glowed. Shivers shook me and made me jump up. Black and massive, Krottenriede lay before me with dark windows. The moon sank blood-red behind whipped trees.

Somebody came, put me in a cradle and sang to me, so that I could fall asleep.

But I was awake again in a moment. Lying in the bed with the angel heads, I saw in the first morning light the candles, the light rectangles of the windows, I wanted to move, but my limbs were too heavy.

"You have a fever!" said a dull voice.

Next to me, in a patched robe, sat the magister stirring something in a glass.

"I happened to see you in the meadow outside doing strange leaps, Baron," said Hemmetschnur. "Johann and I ran out there and with great difficulty put you to bed. That is all I know. If I had not still been up the entire night over the cursed wood bills who knows whether we would not have picked you up frozen to death in the cold dew."

He held the glass to my lips, and I drank.

"Am I sick then?" I asked.

A great weakness was in me.

"It seems so," he returned. "I knew how it would turn out if one had to lie in this room at night, and especially on the last of April, at Walpurgis. The master of the hound is already up and asks vehemently what the noise in the break of day was all about. I must tell him; otherwise all hell will break loose. Get some sleep and next time keep your hands off things that are not fun to play with!"

And he pointed with his finger at the blue pot that lay shattered on the floor.

His face seemed to me to be as morose and off color as the nasty day that was slowly creeping up. I closed my eyes and called inside with all my might for the Ewli, who did not want to appear to me.

I had indeed become seriously ill and lay weak and faint in the four-poster bed, whose bruised angel heads made faces at me when the fever heat rose.

The magister took good care of me, and the master of the hound appeared once, with his foot still wrapped, sat next to me for a while and again told me a stunt that he and my father had performed at the duke's court, by putting a large water frog into the night gown of a distinguished lady.

In the evening between eleven and half past eleven I heard his loud singing. I distinguished the manner of a hunter's song:

"A little fox I want to catch,
Red as my beloved's hair."

This song made me weep in my weakness, and I thought with new, hot tears of my Zephyrine in the rose bushes, as she had said, "I carry under my heart a little vixen of the female sex," and how horribly it had turned out.

And yet it had been so long ago that I was allowed to believe that the pain in my chest had cried itself to death.

My eyes became wet around Aglaja, too, and I saw her again with the glittering crown of the dead in the flickering of the candles.

What purpose had my unhappy, miserable life served? To whom had it been of any use? Passions, all the garbage of sins, and wicked ghosts were its contents, and now the path descended gently toward the end. Oh,

how I resented myself so deeply when I looked back at the lost years! Hardworking farmers plowed their meager field in trickling sweat, craftsmen worked their hands without rest for the sake of their daily bread, doctors sat at the beds of the sick, full of care and heavy with knowledge, scholars researched and pondered with extinguished lamps, musicians delighted with the sweet playing of the human heart. And me? Here I lay, a diseased trunk that bore neither leaves nor blossoms and was devoid of any fruit of life. Hans Dampf himself had not staggered more uselessly through existence than I had. But suffering, suffering had been heaped upon me to the fullest extent, and now I felt more than pain. For within me was the terrible feeling of purposelessness and the ripeness of decay.

"Everything served your purification," said a soft and mild voice in a language that was completely foreign to me. Yet I understood it, as if it were my own.

Beside my bed, in the twilight, stood, enclosed in a very fine, clear bluish light of its own, Ewli.

It was him. Under the black turban between the arches of the brows was the red horizontal mark; the eyes shone like black fires, in which the noble, brownish face was without wrinkles. Around the neck and on the chest were yellow amber beads on the reddish-brown cloth of the robe.

"Who are you -?" I asked.

My voice was toneless, like the voices one hears in a dream.

"I am here," it wafted toward me.

Around the red lips, which crowned a small black beard, went a mild, understanding smile, which was like a soft caress for me.

"At last you have come -" I whispered.

"I have come."

"Is this your true form?" I asked.

"It is the shape you gave me."

"I gave you?"

"You chose this shape."

I suddenly saw myself as a child, immersed in adoring in front of the glass lintel, under which stood the small image of the one who now appeared to me, as he had so often before. I feared very much that he would slip away this time too, but Ewli, as if he had guessed my fear, smiled softly and said, "You are close to me."

Then it was as if I saw, over his shoulder, a distorted, mischievous face with yellow, piercing eyes, and I cried out, "Another is also close to me!"

"He is everywhere," answered Ewli. "He always walked beside you and beside me."

"Fangerle -" I groaned.

"To name is to call," the voice continued. "Give him no name, and he is no more."

The sickeningly grinning face behind him disappeared into the half-light, and was no more. A golden gleam entered the eyes which looked at me benignly, like a reflection of immeasurable glory.

"You have walked so deeply through hardship and torment, that he has no more power over you. You are near the goal, brother."

"Help me!" I moaned. "I am so weak -."

"You are tired from the long way and still have more to walk. Only you alone can help you, for I am you," he said.

"I don't understand you -"

I lifted my aching head.

"What then is the goal?"

"Eternal life," he said, and in that moment, the gloomy chamber became so dazzlingly bright, that I closed my eyes.

When I opened them again and feared to look into the void, I saw, to my indescribable consolation, that Ewli was still with me.

"I am Isa Bektschi, Isa the guardian," I heard him say.

"So you watch over me?"

"Always over you."

"And where is my path going, Isa Bektschi?"

With a trembling heart, I looked at him.

"To the rebirth," he replied, and over his unspeakably beautiful face, once more shone a bright radiance.

"But death-"

"The immortal returns to God," It sounded solemnly.

"Every man's immortal?" I asked, reaching out to him.

"Every human being."

"So everyone is reborn, Ewli?" Sweet hope descended upon me.

"Twofold is the way of rebirth according to the law," he spoke, and his voice was deep like the sound of bells.

“Unconscious and conscious.”

Fear seized me at this word.

“And I -?” I groaned out. “Help me, Brother!”

“Only you can.”

Agonizing effort was in me, the ardent desire to understand.

I wanted to stand up, to ask, to plead - but I could not. I looked at him imploringly, praying in mute fear that he would stay. But he spoke quietly and insistently, and from his gaze poured a bright glow into my soul.

“Take note! A powerful ruler and wise man once had a villain put to death, and there was a voice in him that no human being should end another man's life prematurely. When now the condemned knelt on the blood leather to receive the fatal stroke he looked at the ruler with a look in which there was so much fervent hatred that the wise ruler was frightened. Then the ruler said:

“If you desist from evil, I will give you life.”

Then the evildoer laughed and cried out, “You only dare not let me be killed, for you fear the revenge that my departed spirit will take on you.”

The ruler looked at him and said:

“As little as your head, separated from your body can move towards me and pronounce the word revenge, that is how little I fear revenge from you!”

The condemned man laughed and shouted.

“Executioner, do your duty!”

The sword fell down, and to the horror of those present, the head of the slain man rolled towards the ruler, stood in front of him on the cut neck and formed with the lips, clearly recognizable, the word “Revenge!”, while the gaze took on a horrible rigidity due to the extreme effort and willpower. The faithful saw it in great fear. Then the wise man spoke:

“Fear nothing! I may have done wrong in having this man killed, yet I have protected myself from his anger. For, see, he had to use all his willpower at the moment of death in order to carry out what I had told him. And thereby no power has remained for his later evil intentions. His will has been consumed in a useless effort, and when he returns, he will be without consciousness of what has happened to him. If only he had thought of how to retain consciousness beyond death, he would have become an Ewli, one who returns. But no evil one can become an Ewli!”

I remained mute with amazement. It seemed to me as if I were standing in front of an open gate, which I had carelessly passed, without knowing that behind it was hidden the solution to all questions.

"Understand me, brother. I'll show you the way."

"The wish at the moment of death --", I said to myself. "To take the consciousness beyond death -- to save the memory --"

"You have understood. Farewell!"

Slowly glittering in the twilight, his figure became indistinct, only his face still shone.

"Stay, stay with me -" I wanted to call, but no sound came out of my mouth.

Then he said slowly and clearly words, whose meaning I no longer understood:

"Hamd olsun -tekrar görüschdüjümüze!"

I was awake, didn't see him anymore.

"Isa bektschi!" I shouted. "Stay with me!"

But only my own hoarse voice echoed in the wide space.

Why had I understood him before and now I didn't? And it had been the same language - I remembered it as one remembers a blown note whose tone, the sequence of which is fading more and more from memory.

Hastily I spoke the unknown words to myself twice, three times, until they were indelibly burned into my memory like the words of a prayer recited a thousand times.

Why did my heart ache so much?

How many questions I still had to ask! How I would have liked to ask him about Aglaja, about Zephyrine, about the haunting of the night of hell.

Didn't he say we were one?

"I am you?"

He was in me, and only from me could the answer come. From the depths of consciousness, when the hidden would awake. When the state occurred, in which all riddles spread out legibly, like clear writing.

So calmly my heart beat, free from all fear, free from expectation, and so safe and happy was I as a child in a mother's arms.

"Death, where is thy sting?"

Like distant, comforting ringing these words from the holy book came to me. There was no death for the one who wanted to live. Life for all eternity, life until complete purification, until the purification, until the

glorious emergence, until the conscious being in God. Tears of joy ran down my cheeks.

Everything was only a wandering in the darkness, and to me shone a faint glimmer of the inextinguishable light that shines at the end of the path through the eternities. As far as it might be, as much fear and hardship still lurked at the sides of the path - which led to the goal. Isa, the guardian, had shown it to me. What could happen to me, and who could harm the immortal part of me?

The door opened. The Magister Hemmetschnur came to my bed, holding in his hand a silver cup with a cool potion of mint and sugar water.

"You must have met a strange monk on the stairs," I said quickly. "A man in a brown robe with a black turban, and yellow beads around his neck."

"The fever is rising -" he grumbled peevishly to himself.

"No, no," I implored him. "The stranger was with me just now, standing there before my bed. He could not have gone unnoticed."

And I described Ewli to him once again and urged him to call him back in a hurry.

"Baron," said the magister. "You have had a dream. For half an hour I've been sitting on a chair by the corridor window reading in front of your door. No one has entered your room, so no one could have come out of your room. That's what common logic says."

Exhausted, I sank back into my pillows.

"Dreamed -?"

Like a bitter taste it came to my tongue. But then I started up again up.

"Hemmetschnur, you have been in Stambul for a long time, and many languages are known to you. What does the sentence I am about to recite to you mean?"

And slowly, emphasizing word by word exactly, I recited to him the last sentence which had reached me:

"Hamd olsun tekrar görüschdüjümüzel".

The magister's eyes snapped open. His mouth remained open. Then he wiped his face with his hand, looked at me again and shook his head:

"By the diamond of the Great Mogul! Baron -it is the purest Turkish!"

"What does it mean? I want to know what it means!"

I demanded in my impatience.

He drew a deep breath, looked at me with a shy look and spoke:

"It means, thank God, we will meet again!"

"Thank God!"

I repeated with a sigh. I laughed with joy and patted his haggard hand that held the cup.

"Strange things are happening in this witch's room this day," he nodded at me. "The man, that you have seen, Baron Dronte--that's what the Islamic dervishes look like and no others. This is stranger than strange!"

"I also want to give you the means so that you can escape from this house, Herr Magister", I said quickly. "You have had to stay until now, I can see that. But since it is for my sake that you martyred yourself here, it is also my duty to help you!"

Then he fell to his knees before my bed, so that the cup fell to the ground and spilled its contents.

"God bless you deeply, you great and kind man!" he sobbed and kissed my hand. "A little longer and I would have escaped in another way, hanging from the window cross, and rather in the deepest underworld than in the mill of the miserable days here."

He picked up the cup.

"I hasten to bring another drink, gracious lord!" he cried, laughing and crying and ran out.

My eyes fell closed.

Delicious languor held me embraced.

"Thank God - we shall meet again!"

Thank God! Thank God!

Now, whatever would come, would come. And nothing of what had been in my life, neither good nor bad, had happened without a reason.

Thank God!

It was mostly quiet around me, and only the thanks came and went. I preferred that to when the old man stomped in, sat down on my bed, sprinkled everything with snorting tobacco and started to tell dirty stories, or told adventures from his and my father's old days.

The one I got along best with was the magister, who was busy and ready to serve me. I felt his grateful look. Most of all I was pleased that he did not want to leave, although he had been given good travel money, but thought to wait until I was undoubtedly well and in good health.

He provided me with all the necessities, and when it became too bad with the beard, he barbered me with great skill. When I was alone again, I took the hand mirror that he had left on the bedside and looked into it. Yellow and haggard my face looked out of it and silver frost lay on my hair. Yes, I had grown old, old and tired. With melancholy I looked at the leafless crowns of the poplars in front of my windows, which, like me, seemed doomed to die soon, but this melancholy was mixed with a joyful confidence. With strong hope I thought of the stone that I had seen in the graveyard of my homeland, the stone that bore the saying of Herr Thomas More: *Non omnis moriar*, I will not die completely.

Again I held with an uncertain hand the round mirror in front of my face, and as I held the glass a little obliquely, a sweet woman's face with red hair appeared, which was only a little darker than the gold hood that adorned it. It was the portrait hanging on the wall of Lady Heva Weinschrötter, which had been reflected back. The gray eyes looked at me half questioningly, half knowingly, around the mouth seemed to play a secret smile but it changed under my gaze into a heart-broken expression. I could no longer turn my eyes away from her; I could not resist the compulsion that was pressing in on me.

The roundness of the mirror widened, shrouded everything like a fine moon mist, and drew me under its spell. Gradually, I felt as if I were among people of another time and was one of them.

Wasn't it this room-? A table stretched out on the wall, and I was sitting there myself in a black coat trimmed with narrow strips of fur. Two equally dressed people were to my right and left, and at the narrow end of the table the deeply stooped and blinking Magister Hemmetschnur wrote. It was him, even though he was wearing a white monastic habit and over it a black throw-over. And in front of the table, with loosened, copper-gold hair, stood Lady Heva Weinschrötter - no, for God's sake, it was Zephyrine in the dark gray, blood-encrusted torture shirt, from which her snow-white skin shone. She looked at me with crazy eyes; her ankles were blue, her hands were tied to a black leather rope, which ran through the top of the bare iron ring in the vaulted ceiling, and its other end was held by a human being in his coarse hand, who gazed with small, treacherously puffy eyes out from the holes of a dull red girdle that covered his face and broad shoulders.

With paralyzing horror I looked myself in the face, saw how greedily and flickeringly my eyes burned, how my mouth was narrow and angry and

spoke with cruel calm:

"Weinschrötter, you come before the Inquisition in the second degree, I ask for the second time:"

"Will you confess or not?"

A cry of pain came from her mouth, but she shook her head in denial, so that a red flag waved around her.

The one with the cowl scraped in a basin of glowing embers, and pulled a white-hot iron from the coals.

Then smashing and crashing the terrible image collapsed.

The mirror had slipped from my hand.

Splinters and shards lay scattered on the floor.

The magister entered and said:

"Baron, I'm afraid this means seven years of bad luck!"

"I want to get up and leave," I ordered. "Get me a carriage. I don't want to spend another night in this room."

"You are too weak, Baron," he said and then added. "I know a carriage. The driver Peter will be happy to hitch up if I send him mail. But it's a long way to the next town."

"Get me a carriage," I urged him. "I'm not staying here."

He walked out shaking his head.

I was afraid in that room. The man from the Orient had appeared to me here with a comfort that outweighed all the sufferings and wanderings of my life, yet demons dwelled in these dilapidated walls, which were hostile to all living things. The screams of pain, the curses and lamentations, which still haunted the tattered leather wallpaper, were hiding in the cracks of the wall and in the twilight they were like the buzzing of mosquitoes, yet they had still not succeeded in deluding me into believing that I had attended a coven, that I was among larvae. I listened up and let the magister tell me the miraculous things that the people, tired of the zealousness and the artificially created crisis, had already accomplished in this country, and when he, with fiery eyes and a face that I did not recognize, swore high and dear, that the bright dawn of freedom would rise from the smoking and stinking debris of the shattered fortresses, this description moved me so much that I felt a desire to see the events in Paris with my own eyes.

Supported by the Magister, I climbed down the crumbling staircase of Krottenriede for the last time and knocked on the door of the master of the

hound.

He was sitting at a table, whistling to himself and looking at the components of a gold-inlaid rifle lock, which he had taken apart and anointed it with a feather from a small bottle of clear bone oil.

When he heard of my intention, he did not want to know anything about it, and said that now the fun days of stalking the red buck would begin and that he wouldn't like it if the son of his old crony Dronte left without a successful hunt and with such an abrupt departure. And as for taking that maleficent fellow, the windy magister along with, it was completely out of the question, since he will be taking the next few days, to write various sharp manifests to the farmers all around, whose dogs would again begin to prowl and roam around and this must be stopped immediately and punished with severe punishments.

I replied to him very politely that I could hardly be restrained from staying on Krottenriede, especially since I had important and urgent business. Otherwise it would hardly occur to me to travel for miles on a farm wagon in a state of half recovery. If he were to take it upon himself to leave me in my infirmity without any other companion than the waggoner, then this was a matter that he would have to decide with his conscience.

These words struck him to some extent, but nevertheless he swayed his head back and forth and said that he did not like to let the magister out of his hand. I, as a nobleman, must understand that such good-for-nothings, when they get the chance would make an attempt to escape. He had confronted the journeyman with the fact that a couple of times the wood invoices had not been correct, for which he, the master of the hound, was himself to blame, nevertheless, it occurred to him that he could threaten the windbag, on the basis of this fact, pay him less and let him walk into the hole until he would willingly return to food and whip. Because, added the old swindler with a wink, he would never get such a cheap and good scribe in his life, and for that very reason, he could not let the man out of his sight.

I stopped and asked him once again to allow the man as my escort, he finally gave in after some cunning consideration and said that he already wanted to authorize the windbag and give him papers so that the rascal with his severed ears would have to return immediately after he had brought me to my destination. But he wanted to advise me one thing: to treat the imaginary one, the scholarly monkey no differently than a pot *de chambre*, porter and lackey, and on occasion not to spare a few kicks or face slaps.

For this is the best medicine for such birds, who secretly think they are better than a nobleman or a good soldier.

I shook his hand and asked for a temporary leave; so that he could think that there was still time and that I would start packing. Instead of partaking in the upcoming lunch, I waved to Hemmetschnur, who was anxiously waiting in the antechamber, since he had always been forbidden to enter the manorial chambers with the exception of the dining room, and quickly climbed with him onto the waiting carriage, which the young farmer on the driver's seat at my command immediately set into motion.

We rattled down the steep road and were only a few thousand paces from Krottenriede when a loud bugle sounded from the heights.

The farmer made an effort to stop the horses, and said:

"The merciful lord is calling us back!"

"You fool!" said the magister. "It's only the hunter Räub, who gives a farewell to the high-born gentleman next to me. Therefore, be quiet!"

So we drove on, and soon the blowing died away, in which I well recognized the call "Rallie", in the fresh wind.

In the afternoon, we stopped in a little village.

My weakness increased considerably. Half asleep I listened to Hemmetschnur, who, after he had gained so much confidence, told me the story of his cut off ears and how this had been a severe punishment for a stupid prank he had committed in Stambul, when he had responded to the waving and nodding of a Turkish, veiled lady, by climbing over a wall, and was immediately seized for the cuttings and, at the command of a man in rich clothes, was wounded by two burning cuts with a hand-held scimitar, which one of them pulled out of his belt, and was deprived of his ears. When he collapsed from pain, weakness and loss of blood, the cruel man's servants dragged him out into the deserted street, in the sweltering heat of the noon, and threw him on a heap of dung and rubbish, where he remained. Towards evening he awoke and felt how the fierce wild dogs that they have there in all the alleys licked his wounds for the sake of blood, and this was the reason that no inflammation appeared. A compassionate Muslim picked him up and took him to a Franciscan monastery, where he was cared for.

And the most distressing thing of all was that he learned later that the veiled lady had been a nasty old hag who had wanted to have some fun, which was made worse by the arrival of her son-in-law, a Pascha as powerful as he was violent, who had brought it to such a miserable end.

I was not able to take food and I kept seeing the cut off, shell-shaped ears of the magister in front of me, and how shaggy dogs fought over the bloody pieces in the yellow dust of the street.

When we arrived in the Rhenish city toward evening and the carriage was parked in front of the door of the inn "Zum Reichsapfel", I gave Hemmetschnur leave, although he was very concerned about me and wanted to stay with me. But I reminded him to cross the river before the city gates closed or before a messenger on horseback from the master of the hound came behind them.

Then he was so frightened that his teeth snapped open struck one against the other. Once again he kissed my hand, bowed many times and then pointing to the wide, calm stream, said:

"I go to freedom, my patron! Wherever I see you again, my Herr Baron, I will serve you faithfully and be yours with blood and life!"

After I had amply rewarded Peter, the driver, who had observed the departure of the magister with much head scratching and frowning, I entered the inn.

"The gentleman is burning red in the face," said the waiter, who directed me to my room. "The gentleman should go to bed; I will immediately call Doctor Schlurich."

He helped me to undress, and immediately after that I felt the hot waves and the shivering chill of the fever that was setting in again. And then there was darkness around me, out of which an endless procession of sights passed by me, even more morose and sullen than the face of the magister on the day when I had first seen him at Krottenriede Castle.

After long weeks of a bedridden life in which I barely stirred, after countless days in which my inner gaze firmly and unwaveringly held the image of Isa Bektschi, the hour came when I, as if awakening from a deep sleep, saw doctor Schlurich sitting at my bedside. He was a slim man of about forty years, very distinguished and intelligent-looking, with a high, clean forehead and beautiful eyes. His black suit was made of the finest fabric, and in his tie was a bright green emerald of great value, and his hands were delicate, white and well-groomed.

"My lord baron," he said in a pleasant and subdued voice. "I am glad that your vigorous nature and will to live have won the not easy victory over a severe nervous fever."

"And your art," I added politely.

"My skill can, at the best of times, support the secretive forces with which the body can defend itself against the impending decay, can even summon it, can alleviate pain and restlessness, but must - with the exception of a few cases - as it were, watch, how the quarrel surges to and fro. The friendly fighters against death here and there with this and that means to bring support (and it may be that this is sometimes decisive), but on the whole the sick person must find the remedy in himself or bring it forth. This time you, distinguished Herr, were on the way into the shadow realm, and you have rightly returned!"

With that, he stood up, told me to eat the meal he had ordered, a chocolate pudding with jams, and then to go to sleep.

I saw him slowly leave the room, with a friendly face, holding a stick with a golden pomegranate daintily pressed to his chin. After a few days I got up, and this all the more gladly, as in the last days various noises, coming from the outside, such as shouts, whistles and voices, had disturbed the silence of my room.

With the help of the servant of the inn, I dressed and had my hair done, during which I perceived that the silver hoop of old age had fully descended on my head during my illness. The good-natured servant told me many horror stories from France, where blood flowed in streams and a human life was not worth three pennies. The plague of the frenzy for freedom was already spreading, and even in this otherwise calm and quiet old-fashioned little town, all kinds of disgusting and unpleasant things had happened in the last few days, which had been of the journeymen and the erection of a liberty tree. However, the city council had wisely submitted a petition to the highest authority for cavalry and a battalion of infantry, which, as the princely book keeper Gailer had informed him confidentially, should be complied with as soon as possible.

When I had finished, I slowly descended to the dining room and found there at the common table, to my great delight, Doctor Schlorich, who immediately left his place and sat down next to me.

We naturally got into a conversation about the exciting events in the city, which had become like a faint flame to the immense blaze of purple in France, but still seemed worthy of attention. I said that I felt a great desire to go to the city of Paris, to study the immense changes there at close quarters and observe them. I could not conceal from him that the movement

that had begun there was of great interest to me, was meaningful for the whole of mankind and downright promising.

Doctor Schlurich looked at me with a very thoughtful look and said that he was somewhat surprised to see a nobleman from an old and famous lineage see anything but cheap disgust in these events. The profound upheaval which was only in its infancy could not possibly be welcomed by a caste whose privileged existence rests on an artificial nimbus and a carefully sanctified tradition. He asked me, however, not to misunderstand him. Because his initial astonishment about my behavior was a thoroughly joyful one.

I replied that I had suffered a self-inflicted humiliation in my youth that had given me the opportunity to go to school among people of the lowest classes, which, whether it was good or bad, had given me the opportunity as a student of freeing myself from all arrogance and conceit of status. In addition, I had gained the valuable awareness that the so-called differences in standing were created by artificially erected and easily removable barriers, which had arisen and were maintained, to deprive the children of the poor from any better education and the cultivation of their noble feelings, which later on resulted in their crudeness and ignorance. The undeniable merits of the society to which the nobility and the refined bourgeoisie enjoyed, were only the result of a carefully conducted education. If this could only once be shared not just with the privileged classes, but with all members of the human race, humanity would not only protect itself with the noblest weapon, but it would also bring an immeasurable abundance of talents and abilities into a new light that has never existed before. Indeed those places, where they shyly blossom in spite of all the pressure, and are suppressed as dangerous to the state without any knowledge.

"You are a nobleman in the inner sense of the word," said the doctor and bowed.

I felt the blush of shame rise to my face, and silently I thought of many things in my life, which were of an ugly nature and would always remain as stains on me.

"However, *cher haran*," the doctor continued, "I don't know whether, if you were to ask for my advice, I would advise you, to witness the great upheaval in the immediate vicinity, that is to say, in Paris. Consider:

If one cleans a neglected place in his garden, in order to grow useful and lovely plants, and removes the old stones and debris, ugly worms, woodlice, centipedes and all kinds of nasty creatures, which now crawl from their dark places, run around and fall on each other in sudden greed. So it is also with those social changes that are called revolutions. Until the noble core, the light of freedom, shows itself, there is abominable work to be done, which perhaps people can only see who look back after many years, but to those who experience it, their souls are filled with such horror that they no longer recognize anything else, and even lose hope. Revolutions are filled with filth, blood, shouting, evil deeds, wild development of the animal instincts and base greed, and it takes a long time for the jet of fire that shoots up to become pure and free of filthy cinders, and the dominion of the senseless to move into the hands of sensible men."

A wild yelling and screaming outside the windows interrupted him. In the dining room there was a hurried pushing back of the chairs and jumping up. One saw people outside walk by on the street, first individually, then dense masses, and behind them came a closed united front of dragoons, which struck with the flat of their swords and thus cleared the street. All this passed quickly, the shouting and the clattering hoof beats on the cobblestones disappeared, and in a few minutes the street was quiet again, covered with lost hats, sticks and other things.

"Our good Germans are slowly maturing," Doctor Schlurich returned back to the table. "And many a thing will still pass over our people, until they are able to assert inner and outer freedom, from which, by the way, even the French will still be without. The merit, however, of having made a start could be left to them, if one did not have to concede it from the standpoint of higher justice from the English viewpoint. Nevertheless, Herr Baron: The Germans will, after much suffering and hardship be the chosen ones, from whom the salvation of the world emanates. This is my belief."

We were silent for a long time, and our conversation turned to other things. I learned that Doctor Schlurich, born in Köllen, had settled here, not so much to earn money, which in his circumstances was not necessary, but in order to calmly work on unknown phenomena of a psychical nature, with whose research he was mainly concerned. Here he had made a very special find. Namely, in a house of the city lived a Demoiselle Köckerling, who, in the company of various doctors was often put into a magnetic sleep and in this state was asked questions about the past and the future, as well as the

most diverse things to which she answered completely and correctly. If I happened to be interested in such secrets of nature, which only the unintelligent can connect with ghosts and devils, it would be easy for him to introduce me there. Since the person must be kept secret and lives from her art, it is, however, customary to give a *douceur* in gold at the first entrance.

I was immediately ready to be led by him into the house, and thanked him for his trust.

When it began to dawn, we went on our way.

A cool, damp wind was blowing from the Rhine. The wet air penetrated chillingly through our coats. In several streets we were stopped by patrols on horseback with loaded carbines, but were allowed to pass as persons of distinction.

After some wandering we found the house "Zum silbernen Schneck", in which the demoiselle lived.

Only after knocking several times was the door opened to us by a man, who was finally able to hide his hesitation for fear of the craftsmen and ship's servants, who, together with the evil folk from the taverns, hooting "Ca ira" and hammering on the gates, had raged in the alley a short while ago to get the prostitutes living in the house next door and take them with them. Soldiers would have quickly driven the screamers away and then would themselves have gone through the door with the red lantern.

We climbed the narrow staircase by the light of the tallow candle that dripped between his fingers, and after a special kind of knock, were led into a bright, octagonal chamber, whose windows were tightly curtained. There was nothing to be seen in it but an armchair upholstered in worn brocade, next to which, on two small tables, burned many-armed candlesticks, and in front of it a row of ordinary wooden armchairs, on which some men sat waiting. They turned their heads toward us. Both could be easily classed among the scholars by their dress and the expression of their faces.

Doctor Schlurich and I approached the waiting people and gave our names, which was answered in the same way.

"-especially the prophecies of the demoiselle should be strictly examined," one of the gentlemen, who was addressed as "Spectability" continued his speech, which was interrupted by our entrance.

"All the more so, as the man who pretends to put her into a magnetic sleep collects one louisdor per person. My esteemed colleague Professor Fulvius, who watched the demonstration was not satisfied in all respects.

Those bluish efflorescence's which you could observe perfectly, on the hands of Emmerentia Gock in Ebersweiler, who is said to be possessed by the devil, are completely absent, and everything that is going on is just limited to some at times certainly astonishing messages about the lives and fates of the people present."

"Whereby it is respectfully to be noted," said a small, skinny man with a reddish wig in the highest falsetto "that the prophesies of the woman, in so far as they refer to the future, are completely worthless scientifically, because at present they are unverifiable."

"Maybe so, maybe so," growled a fat, frowning man with a coarse face and a high collar. "Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to consider the not yet confirmed fraud from the outset as a premise. We are man enough to get to the bottom of the thing, and I'm not concerned with light phenomena or nonsensical tapping."

Just then, a small wallpaper door opened, and a somewhat crooked, elderly girl with an unattractive and yellow face entered. She was dressed in a gray silk robe and sat down in the arm chair after a curtsy to those present, spreading and smoothing her skirt.

Behind her stepped a darkly dressed man with an unpleasant facial expression and piercing eyes, whose age was between thirty and forty, not far from that of the woman. In his face, strangely enough, the facial expressions changed constantly, so that one could believe, his mood swung between laughing and crying. He bowed, collected the required *douceur* on a silver plate, put the plate in front of one of the candelabras, bowed again and then said with a hard accent, as it is peculiar to German-speaking Russians:

"This Demoiselle Maria Theresia Köckering, from Reval, 38 years old, is capable of answering all the questions addressed to her, whether they concern the past, the present or future of the esteemed personalities present here, once she has gone into magnetic sleep."

He approached the table, extinguished some of the brightly burning wax candles, then went to the motionless girl, stretched out his fingers toward her face and softly stroked her forehead, eyes and temples several times. Then he turned around.

"She's asleep now," he said.

We looked at her and had the impression of a seated person deeply lost in sleep.

"I beg your pardon, my highly respectable gentlemen!" continued the man in a subdued voice. "There is a certain amount of silence required for the experiment. If the questions asked are answered well I ask you to confirm half aloud that the answer was correct. If it is not, I ask you to point out without agitation, whereupon I will renew the question. For it happens that the sensitive mind of the demoiselle can experience confusion caused by scary images from other regions. Any fair examination and investigation is permitted. Strictly forbidden is disturbing noise, rough calling, abrupt touching, since physical fright endangers the life of the demoiselle in the highest, because in such a state the soul is only very loosely connected with the body."

A short, disapproving clearing of the throat came from the row of listeners. But the presenter did not pay attention to it, but continued speaking:

"For the time being, I will ask some questions myself. So that the learned audience will understand the simplicity of the process and the impossibility of fraud.

"Demoiselle Maria Theresial" he addressed the sleeping woman in a raised tone.

In a moment, the face of the sleeper began to twitch, and her hands moved restlessly back and forth, grasping at the air and in turn fingering the armrests of the chair.

"Do you hear me, demoiselle?"

"I hear," she said with a strangely altered and deeper sounding rough voice.

"The names of the distinguished and learned gentlemen present here in their seating order from right to left?"

To us he said behind his held out hand.

"She sees everything as it were in a mirror, and that's how she calculates."

The trembling and grimacing became more severe, then a kind of smile appeared flippantly on her face, and she spoke inexorably, rapidly and without any pause in between:

"Doctor Achaz Moll, Professor Gisbertus van der Meulen, Doctor Johannes Baptista Schlurich, Baron Melchior von Dronte, Magister Benedikt Fleck, Spectabilitas Doctor Imanuel Balaenarius, Doctor Veit Pfefferich."

A murmur and nod of approval followed. But Magister Fleck said half aloud, such knowledge can be obtained from such highly famous men.

The man with the sleeping woman shook his head with an angry expression and asked a second question:

"Tell me, demoiselle, on what important work that gentleman is currently working on, who is raising his hand?"

He gave us a sign, and Spectabilis raised his hand, silently invited by all.

Köckerling became lively again, moved her lips, put her hand up several times and then out:

"About the healing effect of pure water in case of Obstipatio and about the harm of too frequent purging."

"*Bene*," said the dean, "Admirable!"

"This, too, can be brought to light - ", whispered the suspicious red haired magister.

"I now ask the honored gentlemen, to ask your own questions as you see fit."

The magnetizer looked with a sharp glance at the magister and with a wave of his hand motioned him to speak.

"How -- how much money do I have in my pocket?" the latter stammered, visibly surprised.

The woman answered without reflection:

"One Laubtaler, but it's fake, and five silver groschen."

The questioner pulled out his little pouch and counted the small amount of cash. It was true.

"Quite nice," grumbled Doctor Moll, and his double chin rested gloomily on his high tie.

"When he asks for his pennies, is it as well to inquire who stole my reddish-brown rooster from my house six days ago?"

"Leberecht Piepmal," came back immediately.

"That thunder may smite you!" the coarse voice started up. "That must be true! I immediately said to my beloved, that Piepmal and no other -"

"*Piano*, my lord," the organizer admonished unwillingly. "Just not too loud! Another of the gentlemen, if you please"

"On which day of the week, month and year did the woman I loved the most pass away?" one of the gentlemen said softly.

The face of the sleeping woman distorted painfully, her mouth closed tightly, and after a while she understood:

"Wednesday, the 12th of Hornung 1754."

"My mother!" A heavy sigh said, that the question had been answered correctly.

I took heart and raised my voice:

"Who visited me there, from where I came to this city?"

The sleeping woman stroked with her hand the back of the chair, shook her head softly, and then let out a sound like a soft laugh and spoke:

"You yourself -" she said.

A murmur rose.

"Attention, Demoiselle!" sounded the commanding voice. "The gentleman himself could not have done it. Once more!"

"Isa Bektschi - yourself -- your brother in you-.-" she whispered, barely audible, "Ewli -"

"I ask, my lord, whether this answer is understandable to you?"

I nodded mutely.

"But we don't understand it," the magister blurted out. "What do you mean by that?"

"What do you mean demoiselle?" the man repeated readily.

"The coming back," she breathed.

"She babbles," grumbled Doctor Pepperich.

"Still, some things have been amazing so far. May I do one more question?"

"Please."

"What is it? It's on my desk at home, once alive and very clever and is now useless and dead."

The magnetized one breathed heavily, thought strenuously and reached out with her hand to her throat, catching her breath with difficulty, as if a choking attack was coming over her. Then she said heavily:

"The hand - of the - hanged Janitschek from Prague."

The doctor passed a blue cloth over his sweating forehead.

"Guessed," he gasped. "The hand of the Bohemian thief lies withered on my table."

"It is astonishing, after all," Dean Balaenarius cleared his throat. "The phenomenon is not so easy to grasp -."

The man in the dark habit stepped forward.

"My esteemed ones," he said. "The Demoiselle is greatly fatigued and in need of early rest. May I ask for a few more questions about the future?"

But no one moved. No one seemed to have the desire to look behind the dark veil.

Then Doctor Schlurich half rose from his seat, opened his mouth, wanted to speak, but changed his mind and sat down again.

"Right now he is with her," said Köckering tonelessly.

The doctor made a defensive gesture, as if he didn't want to hear anything, and leaned back, deathly pale, with quivering lips, in his chair.

"That was her oath-!" I heard him say softly.

"May I do one more question?"

I stood up. So far I had remained so dazed by what the clairvoyant had told me that everything around me was as if in a dream, but only at the surface, as I had been lost in my own thoughts.

A silent, somewhat impatient movement of the hand invited me.

"When will I see Isa Bektschi again?"

I asked.

The demoiselle raised her head, shuddered inward and groaned.

"A knife hangs - falls -. -Ah!"

A shriek came from her mouth. She squirmed in her chair, half opened her eyes, so that one could see the whiteness, jumped up briefly in the chair and fell back heavily.

Everybody had jumped up.

"A hysteric," someone said loudly.

"For today the demonstration is finished," sounded the voice of the man standing next to her. "I hope that the gentleman has not been left unsatisfied, namely the gentleman who has had his rooster stolen."

Someone gave a forced laugh.

Everyone was pushing towards the exit, pursued by the sneering looks of the pale man.

I looked around once again. The girl was awake, looking around confused and astonished.

A shiver ran down my spine, as if death were standing behind me. We hastily descended the stairs.

"It's a pity I didn't ask to know the day of my death," crowed Magister Fleck. "Could have made my dispositions in good time."

"You did well to omit that question."

It was Doctor Schlurich who spoke these words.

No one made any reply.

In the thick, gray river fog that rolled through the streets, we parted.

Silently I walked next to Doctor Schlurich.

"I suspected that she was deceiving me. But it hurts when you know for sure," he said softly.

He shook my hand and disappeared around the next street corner.

Far and near sounded the calls of the patrols and watchmen.

"A knife hangs - then falls -", The Pythia had shouted.

Icy cold crept under my coat and shook me. The handle of the bell pull at the inn was a small, brassy hand, a small, cold hand of death.

When my extra mail coach had crossed the French border, and the horses had to be fed and watered in a respectable spot, I went to the inn and had an egg dish prepared for me.

The tables around me were full of people. Carters, peasants, merchants, burghers and craftsmen were discussing with all the liveliness of their nature the latest incidents, the increasing frequency of executions. Recently, very close to this place the castle of a very haughty and extremely hard-hearted Viscount against lowly people, was stormed by the peasants and after a thorough plundering was set on fire. Some of those who drank the thick red wine openly boasted of the deeds they had committed.

When I heard how beastly the people had been in the priceless library and in the picture gallery of the castle, how they had used the porcelain as chamber pots before smashing it as night crockery, I had to think of the words of Doctor Schlurich, who warned me against observing revolutions at close range. Then, when a very ugly, badly scarred fellow started to boast, bawling, how he had speared "Bijou", the favorite dog of the lady of the castle, on a pike and carried it around squirming alive for an hour whimpering, until it finally died in pain and fear, I was seized by a furious anger against this two-legged beast.

But immediately, like a black cloud, the memory of a dog fell on me, whose faithful love I had destroyed in a senseless fit of rage with a deadly stone throw. No, I had no right to be a judge, even though I had only acted in a violent fit of temper, but this man, however had acted in diabolic malice. Tormentingly the thought rose in me that there were people who were evil by nature -. What should happen to them?

"Melchior Dronte!" fluted a repulsive voice. "Melchior! Beautiful Melchior!"

I was so frightened that I almost knocked my wine glass off the table.

I looked to where the voice had come from, and saw an old woman, covered with dirt and rags, sitting at a table. She had a box of multicolored slips of paper sitting next to her, from which a short pole with a crossbar was sticking up. But on the wood sat a parrot, in whose blue-gray, wrinkled skin only a few quills were still stuck, while the large head with the rolling eyes was wrinkled and completely bald. The woman, noticing my gaze, hurriedly stood up, approached my place and after she had slung the strap over her shoulder, blew her burning breath into my face:

"Beautiful, young Herr, Apollonius will tell you prophesy!"

Despite her pitiful appearance, the dripping drunkard's nose and the inflamed eyes I recognized in her the beautiful Laurette and in the parrot, the monster of the Spanish Envoy. A sharp pain went through my heart

when I compared the image of Sattler's Lorle against this gruesome, lemur-like apparition. Although the infernal parrot had called me by my name, there was not a spark of memory in her poor, devastated face. Instead I recognized in the squinting look of the bird such a rage that I could not free myself from a feeling of fear. The dull, old woman, who had once been young, rosy and innocent in my arms, looked at me out of half-blinded eyes and repeated the slurred phrase from before. I slipped a coin into her gouty fingers, which she put in her mouth in a disgusting way for safekeeping, and I saw with satisfaction that for the time being no one was paying any attention to us.

"*Sicut cadaver* -," chuckled the bird. "Kiss her like a corpse, fair Melchior!"

I approached him and said, as if speaking to a human being:

"May you soon be redeemed, poor soul!"

Was it really I who suddenly found these words?

The parrot looked at me with a fixed gaze. All malice disappeared from his eyes, and two large tears rolled down his beak, as I had seen before. It was eerie and poignant beyond measure.

"*Misericordia*," he groaned. "Mercy!"

And then he hurriedly climbed down the short pole, rummaged back and forth with his beak in the colorful papers and grabbed a fiery red one, which he held out to me.

I took the paper from his beak and gave the poor Laurette a gold piece and nodded to her.

Not a ray of remembrance flickered in her features.

With her box, on the crossbar of which the parrot lowered its head on her bare breast, she shuffled to the nearest table.

"*O mon Dieu!*," cried the parrot, and the hopeless tone of this lament went through my marrow and legs.

"Keep your basilisk quiet, you old bone box," cried a carter in a blue smock at the neighboring table. "No one understands its own words. There are no loud aristocrats here, who take pleasure in such silliness!"

"Why don't you turn the collar on that stinking grain-eater, Blaise?" shouted a miller's boy covered in white dust.

"And if you get your hands on an aristocrat, by the way - I'll be happy to help you!" he said, half aloud, with a wry look at me.

Startled, the old woman limped away from the table and huddled in her corner again.

I observed the people, who were mainly given to boastful speeches and certainly not all of them were malicious, and drank my wine slowly. Besides, I had to wait for the new mail coach driver before I could continue my journey.

I put the red square slip of paper from the box of the beautiful Laurette down on the tabletop, and although I told myself that such things could have no meaning at all, I had to remember that Apollonius had selected this note for me and I wanted to pay serious attention to it. In bad print under a series of astrological signs was written:

"There is a great danger threatening you, which is not in your power to ward off. A tremendous change will happen to you, but fear nothing: for you it will be nothing more than the precursor to a new life."

I could not see anything else in this writing other than the ambiguous and naturally quite indeterminate nature of such fortunes which are given for a piece of copper, and selected from the heap of similar ambiguous sayings by an animal which is usually trained for this purpose, nevertheless this small piece of paper moved me in a significant way. And even though I was distressed at Laurette's fate, the fate of so many careless and frivolous girls and women, I was almost more moved by pity for the soul, which in a miserable, slowly dying bird body had to atone for a terrible sin unknown to me. I was heartily pleased when the new mail coach driver, a young Frenchman adorned with the tricolor cockade, came in and then politely asked me to get ready for the onward journey.

As I left the room, it was as if I heard scornful laughter and swearing aimed at me. I made an effort to remain completely calm and to excuse the groundless bitterness of people because of the injustice that had been inflicted on them for many generations.

I was quite happy when I drove away in the coach. Admittedly, I was accompanied by all kinds of heavy thoughts. The sight of my former playmate, whom I had left in splendor and glory in Vienna and found her here as a pitiable, and trampled person deprived of reason, and even more the eerie encounter with the ghostly bird Apollonius, in which a damned soul was atoning, and lastly, the painful observation that indiscriminating hatred and blind vindictiveness rose up like an ugly layer of mold in this image of a great national revolution - all this saddened me very much and

almost made me regret having undertaken this dangerous and exhausting journey. But at the same time, I felt the compelling necessity of a fateful decision, which drove me on and perhaps even more than that: the desire that came from the depths for the fulfillment and completion of what I had been destined to do.

Also the conversation with the new coach driver, which he began with me, half turned back, did not help to cheer me up. He saw; that I was a gentleman of distinction, and in spite of the drivel about freedom and equality, this was a source of refreshment to him. Every day he had to deal with the lowest classes of society, who made big words and boasted of their bad manners. Nevertheless, the farther we got into the country, the more he wanted to advise me all the more urgently to howl with the wolves and in particular not to meet in public places, as I had just done, to stay away from the mob. Nothing irritates the rabble more than silent disrespect, for which the otherwise thick-skinned fellows have an exceptionally sensitive feeling. There was nothing else to do than to leave pride aside and be fresh with every brother and pig. For the time being, only the most hated and well-known oppressors of the common man, who succeeded in getting away with their bare lives, should still be happy. But as the signs were, it would soon go against all the nobles, but then also against those who were intellectually superior to the lower people, since they were considered protectors and friends of the old order. Whether the individual lived righteously and honestly, whether he perhaps had even been a faithful helper of the poor and oppressed, or even suffered hardship for their sake, blood-drunk mobs did not think about that.

Among the otherwise light-hearted and good-natured people were mingled at that time riffraff and tavern scavengers, who were only interested to fill their coffers, to drink, to fornicate, to whore, to splurge and to murder. Also even among the leaders, many of whom meant well, they were swamped by those who would use any means and who stirred up the common instincts of the crowd in order to make himself popular with the plebs. A gentleman of my standing would be better in the safety of home, instead of traveling in a country where there is neither discipline nor justice nor security. I would soon see that a limited measure of freedom is like a fortifying drink of good wine, but a mad exuberance like the exuberance, however, as it reigns here, is like senseless intoxication and insanity.

This kind of expression in a mail coach driver surprised me; however, his expression and posture told me that he belonged to the educated classes. And so I addressed the question to him, how it comes that a man of such politesse could not find any other position than that of a stagecoach driver.

The coach driver smiled and said:

"Don't bother addressing me as a gentleman! During this time I am quite modest and observe as a philosopher that which I cannot prevent. Who in such times holds his head too high can easily lose it, and since I only have this one, I am worried about it and on my guard. - Forgive me, mein Herr, but the road is getting so bad that I must turn my attention to it."

With these words he turned and seemed to pay attention only to his reins and the trotting of the horses. But already the nonchalant posture of the reins, indicating great practice and the noble certainty of his movements told me, from which social class my coach driver came from.

In front of a town, which we were approaching, we were stopped by a strong group of armed peasants, who, they claimed, had been assigned to guard the road. One of them grabbed the reins of the horses, which were walking at a walk, while two of them, with their muskets extended, stepped up to the coach.

But the coach driver, about whose fine and educated nature, I had just voiced my thoughts to, spat in a vulgar manner into his hands and shouted in the lowest dialect of the area:

"You dung-scratchers and filthy beetles, you lice-pack want to dare to stop a citizen commissar? Death over my life, if I don't bring you under Doctor Guillotine's machine, you thieves and skunks! Away, by the fiery claws of the devil, or I shall ask the citizen commissar in the coach to write your names in his pocket-book!"

Immediately they drew back, pulled off their greasy hats and shouted:

"Long live freedom!"

Our coach rolled on. The driver laughed to himself.

"What did you say about the machine of Doctor Guillotine?" I asked him.

"Ah - have you heard nothing of it? Imagine that they put you on a board between two beams. High above hangs a knife with a slanting edge, which falls and separates the head so neatly from the trunk as if it were only

a head of cabbage on a thin stalk. It travels around the country, the machine of Father Guillotine."

In my mouth was suddenly a tepid, sweetish taste, which almost made me sick. It was the air in this country that I had in my mouth. It tasted like blood. And with a second-long freeze I thought of the words of Demoiselle Köckerling, her shrill cry--

"A knife hangs - falls -"

In the city, whose gate lay before us, a bell began to ring low and menacingly: Death-Death-Death-Death.

My fear vanished as quickly as it had come.

"Non omnis moriar," I said to myself.

"I will not die completely!"

I was standing under the archway of the Paris house where I lived and looked down the street.

Muffled sounds came closer. Whistles, shrill laughter.

A bunch of soldiers in various uniforms, red and white striped, dirty trousers on their legs, crushed hats with the new cockades on the long hair, came down the street with shouldered rifles. Two barefoot ragamuffin boys ran forward as drummers. On one of the two drums I recognized the scratched, colorful coat of arms of the Esterházy regiment.

Behind the soldiers ran a large crowd of people, girls, men, women and children. Among the people one saw ragged prostitutes, fellows with murderous clubs, tramps, and lowly rabble. In the middle of this throng swayed and bumped a high-wheeled cart on which six people were sitting. The first one my eyes fell on--

Merciful God!

The cart stopped because the procession was stalled, and I looked closely.

The first one I caught sight of was Doctor Postremo.

A shiver of fever shook me.

He was sitting in front, with his hands tied behind his back. His now snow-white ugly ape-head with coal-black thick brows and whiskers sat deep in his shoulders.

His eyes were filled with mortal fear, and his broad mouth stood wide open.

Doctor Postremo!

"Samson won't be able to cope with that hunchback!" The crowd shrieked with laughter.

"They will have to pull out the pumpkin for that one!" answered a second. "Hey, old man? Don't you think so, turtle?"

Postremo made a ghastly face, closed his mouth, gratingly moved his jaws, and then spat in the face of the man who had addressed him.

A burst of laughter flew up.

"Bravo! Good aim, hump!"

Two soldiers pushed back the angry man, who, with his disgusting face covered in spit, wanted to get on the cart. Next to the Italian sat an old, venerable cleric in a torn cassock, behind him was a stern-looking man in a blue silk jacket embroidered with dull silver, and a gaunt lady who moved her lips in prayer. The last seat on the cart was taken by a former officer from the Flanders regiment and a young man, smiling indifferently and contemptuously in a morning suit. The officer bit his lips angrily and said something to his neighbor, who answered with a shrug of the shoulders.

Immediately the cart started to move, rumbling and skidding into motion, and the crowd sang a wild song unknown to me, that roared down the alley. The soldiers put their short pipe stubs on their big hats and sang along enthusiastically.

Without will, driven forward by an irresistible force, I stepped into the middle of the crowd behind the executioner's cart on which sat the wretch who had robbed me of the happiness of my poor miserable life with his satanic arts. Nevertheless, I felt no resentment against him, as much as his look reminded me of the greatest pain that I had ever suffered. But now I felt as if he had only been the tool of an inscrutable power which had directed everything as it had come. It also seemed to me that the terrible end to which he was now rolling toward on the shaking seat of the cart was not in the light of a punishment that had been executed on him, but as a redemption for this poor, wicked spirit, bound in a misshapen body. Between these more foreboding than clear thoughts, was the inexplicable feeling that moved all the people here, the terrible and unfathomable desire to witness a terrible operation on others, which in this time of great death and uncertainty of all fate, excited great interest because without a doubt many of those who today walked along freely and safely might in the very near future experience the same.

In these minutes, the revolution, which I had longed to see close up, was seen as something unspeakably horrible and terrible. It was as if one had unleashed vicious animals against sentient human beings, creatures of the lowest kind, which cannot get enough pleasure in the suffering of their fellow beings, as if demons from the depths had united, to eradicate their former tamers and rulers and with them to exterminate every order. What I saw in the reddened, eye-twinkling, distorted faces around me was not humanity. Then I saw the young nobleman and the officer on the rearmost seat, but also from these victims a cold wave flowed toward me. They were evil in their hearts to the last. It was obvious that to them the people in the street were the same as the cobblestones, the dirt that stuck to the high wheels of the cart, or the half-starved dog that yelped and jumped around the harnessed mares.

In my desolate misery and in the burning pity that almost burst my heart; I nevertheless knew clearly that in the last feelings of these two on the cart lay all their guilt. They had despised all people, God's creatures as well as they, all their lives and still despised them in their own bitter hour of death, because they were unclean, uneducated, sweaty and lousy. These nobles did not consider that their own insensitivity had made of them what they were: a horde of half-animals, who had to defend themselves against the cruel scourge of poverty and being outcasts.

They had known how to prevent it, if one took them as symbols of a caste, prevented people from reaching the heights of a decent life. Again and again shoved the unfortunates into their doghouses and holes, pressed them into the fronts, and in shallow dalliance mocked the muffled cry from the depths. At last, when even the excessively rich resources that had been withdrawn from the others, ran out, they heaped up the grain of the fields into locked barns, in order to sell sparingly and with usurious profits to the starving, during the coming famine. They had forced a painful bridle between the teeth of the desperate and tightened the reins, while their whip tore bloody weals. Thus the masses had now finally burst their bonds in insane rage and torment, and the dull masses had acquired a flaming will: the will to destroy, to slaughter, to tear to pieces the wanton, the tormentors and to wipe them off this earth forever. Who but knew how to read the people's faces, in those faces, in their ignorant and still astonished expressions, he knew in retrospect that the power that had been shattered, if it had been used with a little kindness, with wise prudence humanity, would

have endured for a long time and could have achieved a bloodless, peaceful transition to a more just distribution of goods. But so it was, as if these kings, dukes, counts and rulers of all kinds had undertaken the ludicrous attempt to see how long and to what extent they could torture patient people, until they would finally rise up against the burden of tortures. And yet I also felt sorry for them.

I was soon awakened from my thoughts by the senseless and agitated pushing after me of those who also wanted to be part of the sad procession.

I was startled when, with a jerk, everything stopped and the people flowed apart. We had arrived at a not too large square surrounded by old, steeply gabled houses with blackened walls; my feet almost sank in a sticky, dark mud that covered the ground, and I had to find a somewhat elevated spot on the pavement to escape the vile swamp, whose foul-sweet haze enlightened me about its nature. Around me was a wild roar and murmur of voices. All the windows were crowded, and from there cloths were waving to acquaintances on the street.

Just in front of me, in the middle of an irregular square, towering over all the heads, hoods and hats, stood a slim, reddish-brown, two-footed gallows, on which at the top under the crossbeam, the drop knife hung slanting and flashing. The posts, between which it ran, shone dark and greasy in the daylight, so much was the wood smeared with blood and human grease. The condemned men rose stiffly and with great effort from the seat boards of the cart. A horse neighed, scenting the haze of the square. The poor condemned who had arrived at their final destination now helped each other politely and courteously to dismount, the old clergyman made an effort to help the crippled Doctor Postremo, who was making terrible faces and chattering with his teeth. I saw the white-powdered hair of the other and the hunchback's fuzzy head walking the narrow alley between the soldiers. The doomed men quietly and slowly climbed the small staircase up to the blood scaffold. Abusive words flew at them, fists were shaken, ugly, fat market women, who stood in the front row, sitting on benches knitting, were even telling dirty jokes.

I saw exactly every single face and except for Postremo, who grimaced, they all looked with a stony attitude in face and gesture towards what was coming. The ring of people around Guillotine's machine found itself in grinding motion, and I was gradually pushed very close, so that the victims stood with their faces turned toward me. I wished myself far away,

to get rid of the terrible pressure under my heart, with which the sight of such sad preparations tormented me. But I could not move, as I was wedged so tightly, I could not even turn my head away from the tangled hair of an unclean woman who smelled of garlic, and I had to be sneezed on from behind by a man who had caught the sniffles. But these small adversities quickly faded before a nameless horror.

Now a giant swung onto the scaffolding, whose sight surpassed in meanness everything I had ever seen in my varied life. On tremendously broad shoulders, over a naked, red-haired chest and muscular arms rose the face of a devilish monkey with bared teeth, maliciously glowing eyes and a fiery comb of red-yellow bristles. Samson, whose portrait I had seen in a bookstore, it was not. I knew that he was indisposed and that his first assistant was standing in for him. Horror seized me at the sight of this guy.

This man-beast, who was followed by two crude-looking figures grinned, licked his blue lips and then pointed with a flat thumb at Postremo. The two guys behind him pounced on the hunchback in an instant, who kicked with his feet, hissed incomprehensible words and pulled his misshapen head even deeper into his shoulders. They tied him with lightning speed to a vertical board, and tipped him over, so that the helpless man was lying with his chin on a double board, cut out in the shape of a semicircle, the upper half of which was now pulled down between the posts and pressed down. A shiver ran through me, as the red-haired, blood-black hand of the executioner pushed a protruding knob in the post. The guillotine whistled down. Something jumped into a basket, the hunched body twisted, writhing, and flapping its feet, just as poor Bavarian Haymon did under the murderous ring, and from a huge dark-red wound, from which a flashing semicircle seemed to hang, blood gushed out in thick streams, which then gurgled and ran heavily down the side wall. The executioner's hand reached into the basket, lifted the head up high by the stained, white hair. The axe had not reached the neck, and so the lower jaw was severed and hung separated with the semicircle of the teeth on the body, so that I once more saw the mutilated grimace of the doctor. And this hideous head slowly drew the eyelid over the right eye, as if he wanted to wink at me.

"It's not pretty, citizen - but how could he have dressed up the hunchback angel maker any other way?" said a craftsman next to me, pulling out a flask from the upper, opened part of his burn-stained apron

smock. "Here, drink once - this will keep the food down if it wants to rise from the stomach!"

I took a sip of the pungent and burning juniper brandy, and the trickling warmth inside gave me strength. Once again I looked around me to see if I could not escape from what was coming, but it was impossible to squeeze through this wall of human bodies. A wall was around me that no one could have penetrated.

So I had to witness the execution of all six condemned, and each time the leathery clap of the falling knife sounded, I trembled from my head to my feet. The cold sweat broke out and my legs trembled violently. The last of the crowd, after the old lady, who died quietly and without any movement, came the officer of the Flanders Regiment, who had remained loyal to the king the longest. He placed himself at the board. While the executioners nimbly fastened the blood-soaked straps around his body, he looked at the blood man's face with eyes flashing with anger and said loud and clear:

"Do not dare to hold up my head with your paws, red-bristled pig!"

But the executioner just pursed his bulging lips, waited for the overturning of the board and the clasp of the neck in the hole formed by the two semicircles of the double boards, dropped the axe that the two blood fountains sprang from the stump of the neck, and reached into the basket.

But immediately, with a grunt of pain, he pulled his hand out of the basket and flung his index finger rapidly back and forth in the air, as if he had touched red-hot iron. In a senseless rage, he kicked the basket several times with his foot, so that the severed head bounced and jumped in it. Then he hid the finger of his right hand in his clenched left hand and uttered a blasphemous curse.

"The aristocrat bit his finger!" The man with the apron smock shouted. "They are not so easily killed, these haughty ones!"

Then, as if a bright light shone on me from heaven, I thought of Isa Bektschi and the parable of the beheaded evildoer, who used the last of his last strong will with a similar thought of revenge.

Meanwhile, one of the servants, a jaunty black man, jumped up to the basket, looked inside, at which the bystanders had to laugh, and, grasping his hair with two fingers, lifted his head out. The eyes of the dead man

looked half-closed, contemptuously staring at the gawking crowd, and a thin red stripe ran down his chin.

Cursing, the redhead climbed down from the scaffold.

In the depths of my soul, I understood the effort of the priest, perhaps not entirely comprehensible to himself, although he eagerly displayed it, with which he exhorted the dying to focus all their thoughts only on eternal bliss, repentance of sins, and the continuation of life in God, and to do away with all thoughts of revenge and earthly desires. What immeasurable wisdom lay hidden in this need, what promise and what consolation! An indescribably joyful knowledge glowed through me when I thought of such things and I almost regretted that my own path had not ended here.

Now that there was nothing more to see, the crowd loosened and flowed away, getting lost in the side streets. The windows closed, and the two helpers appeared with water and a cart on which they loaded the dead remains of the executed in a crude manner.

I still stood spellbound in my thoughts of Isa Bektschi's words, which he spoke to me, when I lay ill in the haunted room at Krottenriede, when I felt that someone was looking at me.

When I turned quickly, my eyes met those of a still young man with a brownish face of regular cut and dark eyes, from which an extraordinary willpower flashed at me. A great power emanated from this gaze, with the strange, austere beauty of the face and the harsh mouth that harmonized.

Despite the smallness of his body, there lay in his whole posture something respectful and compelling, which was difficult to escape from. Thus, his appearance captivated me in the highest degree. He wore a very simple uniform unknown to me, and had his arms crossed over his chest.

"You're a stranger?" he addressed me, smiling barely perceptibly.

"I am a German," I answered him.

"Ah, a German!"

He nodded his head.

"A fine people, clever, warlike and obedient at the same time. Excellent soldiers. You witnessed these executions, mein Herr?"

In spite of the danger that such frankness could bring me, I did not hide my disgust from him.

"Yes, yes," he smiled gloomily, "By the actions of these beasts you must have formed an excellent opinion of the French nation. But that

doesn't do anything. These people are good. Only they have a fever at this moment. They will cure it; let it bleed a little -"

I hesitated to answer him, even though there were no listeners nearby. For I was well aware of the fact that the so-called Well-being Committee maintained numerous agents, whose task it was to listen to the speeches of the people and to induce the discontented to make statements, the reproduction of which provided the means to render them harmless. But immediately afterwards I was ashamed of a suspicion over which this man was certainly above. As far as my knowledge of man, I read in this face ruthlessness, indomitable will, and the power to remove unpleasant obstacles by force. Perhaps the little man with the hard mouth was capable of a gigantic despicability when his certainly unusual plans required it, but hardly of a petty action against someone whose path did not cross his. All this I read in the dark abyss of his eyes, from which shone the spark of a genius.

"I deplore it," I said to him, "that bloodlust and vindictiveness sully the garb of the goddess of liberty, and that it is precisely the ugliest drives that are the shoots that appear most conspicuously in the disintegration of a fixed order. Thus it happens to me that what seems great and sublime to me from a distance, appears frightening and devoid of all greatness up close. The freedom of a people --"

"Oh, freedom!" he interrupted me. "Those are silly phrases. The people do not need Freedom, but the firm hand of a leader. Centuries will pass before the people will be ready for the ideals for which the unfounded enthusiasts believe the time has already come. It does not do much harm, however. The heads that are now falling are not worth much, except for a few whose loss is deplorable, and the riffraff are in their own way for the time being. Nevertheless, mein Herr German, I say to you that with this very valuable, fiery and easily treated material the world can be conquered, if it comes into the right hands. Out of these lousy, jeering, broken lads an army of heroes can be created like no other that has ever stomped the ground. The monstrous body, unconscious of its strength lacks only the head to make it insurmountable."

"Surely this head also sits on mortal shoulders," I replied. "And it is, as you know, a bad time for heads."

Again the man's lips twisted into an almost perceptible smile.

"I have good reason to hope that the head I mean will not fall into Samson's basket," he said.

Slowly we walked in the direction of a side alley. Wild, long-drawn out screaming and the wailing of a woman's voice, coming from an old house, made me stop. As we came closer, we saw in the dark hallway a young woman in the labor of childbirth lying on the brick pavement. Under her pain, new life pressed towards the light. Neighboring women took care of the woman in labor, and an old woman told us to unwillingly go on.

"Fat Margot is having another baby! Every year she gives birth to a piglet!" shouted an alley boy and danced on one foot, delighted to be present at this event.

The officer grabbed the boy by the arm, turned him towards him, looked him in the face with a terrible look and said:

"Why are you pleased, cretin? Is it because your replacement is born? He will take your place in the regiment when you are buried in the clay after the battle!"

I saw the lad turn pale under the icy gaze of my companion, as if he had seen the Medusa's head. Shrieking and flailing his arms, he ran down the alley.

I watched him go. When I turned around, the officer had disappeared.

After that day, I did not go out much on the street. Several times at night I heard the pounding of rifle butts at the front doors, the wild weeping of women and the horrified objections of those suddenly arrested who had been dragged out of their beds.

My reclusive behavior noticeably increased the distrust of the house inhabitants. Nevertheless, it was the hardest thing for me to overcome, to enter the streets, where one could see almost only drunken rabble and meddlesome women. One was begged for, harassed in every way, insulted and suspected for no reason.

But on this early autumn day there was such an oppressive sultriness that the stay in my upper level room became quite unpleasant. I chose my most inconspicuous garment, the brown, already damaged travel suit, a simple rain-soaked hat and a crude stick, to distinguish myself as little as possible from those who spoke the big words in the streets. I no longer wore my hair coiffed and powdered, but, according to the new fashion, falling on the shoulders.

Today, too, the streets were full of shouting and partly armed mobs. Recruits, adorned with bows and ribbons, were marching off to the threatened frontiers, and the excitement of the first days of September had increased still further.

Especially near the prison of La Force, all the scum of Saint Antoine and other suburbs seemed to have gathered. The closer I came to the small gate of the prison, the wilder the raving, singing and shouting swelled. Ragged sansculottes- radicals stood here, armed with pikes and rusty sabers, in dense mobs and apparently waiting for something special. A disgustingly overgrown man, who had a cockscomb like violet growth hanging down over his left eye, as I could clearly observe, sneaked around from one group of people to another and everywhere spoke a few words, which were taken up with ear-tearing howls. I deliberately placed myself in the vicinity of such a confluence, in the midst of which a fury with flying strands of hair wielded a butcher's axe, and struggled to hear what the people were so excited about. As soon as I arrived the crooked monster started on the group and whispered:

"Citizens, do you want to see the aristocrat who will soon come out of this prison door, escape to England once more? She will help the fat Capet and the Austrian woman escape from under your noses. Down therefore with the Intendant of the Austrian whore! Down with Lamballe!" Unanimous shouting announced that they were of one mind with him and not one was willing to let the princess Lamballe go, who was the subject of much talk at the time.

"Enough of this gossip, you with your violet growth on your eye!" shouted a person thin as a skeleton. "We want to make cocards out of her guts if she gets into our hands."

"Let me, me!" hoarsely cried a wolf face with enormous jaws and low forehead. "You are all worthless, overcome with pity, when she puts on her little mask -"

"Hey, is your heart made of stone and do you have iron veins, Ruder-Mathieu?" a sloppy woman laughed and pushed the man to the side.

"Do you want to see Louis Capet's souvenir, you pavement kicker?" barked the guy, stretching out a hand surrounded by blue-red rings of scars. "I wore his bracelet for six years, here and on the back of my foot -do you think that makes sugar daddies out of people?"

The smell of liquor, old clothes, and the smoke of bad tobacco wafted around me along with the roar of laughter that rose.

"Murderers of women. By the grace of the king," a voice said softly at my ear. "Look at the cattle, the forehead, the thick eyebrows, the bit -"

"What are you whispering about, old fish-head?"

The galley convict shook his fist at the human beside me. A small, stooped man quickly ducked into the crowd.

"Out with Lamballe! We want the intendant! Break down the door! We want to have a close look at her, back and front, just like her lovers!"

"The judges in there are asleep," crowed the abomination with the facial outgrowth. "We will wake them up!"

"Out with her! Make it snappy, you donkey heads in there! Give her to us!"

In the roaring and pushing of the supremely heated masses, in the midst of brandished sabers, knives, and lances, I stood and gazed at the door as if paralyzed. I was afraid; a devouring fear seized me, literally crushed me. It was an indescribably horrible feeling, a feeling in which dark knowledge was hidden. I knew what had to come unstoppably, as if I had already experienced it all. A beardless, cheeky face emerged inside me, a receding forehead sown with ulcers, beneath sand-colored stubble hair. I looked around and immediately looked into the middle of the face, which already existed in my imagination. But I resisted, again and again and I succeeded in pushing back the certainty coming from within my inner being, without this effort of the will, I could have said at any moment, blow by blow, what was going to happen now. All this was like a dream within a dream yet of shuddering physicality.

In the prison they must have long since heard the howls of the insane crowd, because several times, inquiring and peering faces appeared at the windows of the first floor. But soon the obstinate shouting of the crowd was followed by action; axe blows thundered against the small, heavy door, a dusty pane of glass shattered under the thrown stones. Then a window opened upstairs, a sleepy face with half-closed eyes and sagging cheeks appeared, smiled and nodded to the people, whereupon the shouting intensified to the point of madness.

Only for a moment my eyes were on a gray relief on the wall, when a hurricane-like howling of many thousand voices passed over the windows of La Force were shaking. The small door opened-

In the stone frame stood pale as a corpse, a distorted smile of fear in the beautiful face, her small hands raised as if pleading, a young woman - "Aglaja!" I cried out. It was her. Aglaja.

My beloved, slipped into the realm of shadows, awakened from a deep sleep by the roaring of irritated animals ---

There she stood, threatened by madmen, murderers, by rusty weapons, stones, shaking -.

I screamed, screamed -.

Her blinding forehead opened in a red, gaping crack, her eyes opened wide - from the light brocade of the bodice suddenly rose a greasy, wooden lance shaft - Silk tore with a high-pitched hiss -- a small, plaintive cry - - like a bird call.

Flames fell from the sky, flared up from the earth, and enveloped me.

I pushed and hurled people at people, smashed my cane into a face, slammed my fist into a screaming mouth, sobbed, screamed, kicked, grabbed the handle of a saber, struck so that it sprayed, spitting and roaring louder than the thousands - -

My gaze was drawn tightly to a twitching, white body adorned with blood roses, rough red laughter - I saw a dark hand tugging at something long and pale pink, a naked black foot kicked at a trembling woman's breast ---

A booming blow struck my head.

I fell. I tried to get up on my knees. Devilish faces neighed all around me; in a wide mouth were greenish stumps. In the hollow of two large hands, close to my face, moved twitching a bloody piece of meat, shining red, terrible to look at - a throbbing heart - I fell down on my face. In an unearthly roar the world passed away.

The prison in which I found myself was an old coal cellar and received only a faint light through the small windows, which had never been cleaned. The bars in front of the windows were thickly covered with street excrement, and the yellowish glow left the background in complete dimness.

It took quite some time before the dull pain in my head subsided to such an extent that I could look around in this subterranean room. Again and again I felt the painful lump on the back of my head, which a terrible blow had left behind, and repeatedly I tried to remove my torn, bloody and

covered with street excrement suit in order to clean it. I was not indifferent to my appearance because several ladies were present. They had been given the largest part of the dirty wooden enclosure, and some of the gentlemen who were also in the prison, who, at the moment of their arrest, had an overcoat at the time of their arrest, had disposed of this garment in order to be used as blankets and bedding.

"May I ask your name, Herr?" a tall, impeccably dressed gentleman in a poppy red jacket addressed me. "So that I can introduce you to the others if that is alright with you."

I named myself and was thereupon formally introduced by the Vicomte de la Tour d'Aury to the other prisoners. I was spoken to in an amiable manner with regrets that my so desirable acquaintance had to be made on such a sad occasion. I had unfortunately arrived in Paris several years too late, said a very pretty lady with a little beauty spot on her white and rosy face, and it was more than deplorable that under the present circumstances, one must get a completely wrong impression of the French way of life.

With a bow, I replied that the setting in which people are found is not as important as the fact that people find each other, and that I had already experienced in just a few moments so many pleasant acquaintances, I had been abundantly showered with chivalrous attentions on the part of my accidental comrades in destiny.

Asked about the cause of my arrest, I could not avoid mentioning the murder of the poor Princess Lamballe in the gentlest form. The ladies immediately burst into tears, and several gentlemen, with clenched fists, expressed the ardent desire for unprecedented revenge. To all, however, the sudden death of the beautiful woman on whose energy they had placed great hopes was a heavy blow, which destroyed a large part of their secretly cherished expectations. Now all their wishes were directed to a terrible and bloody retribution, while two floors above, it was surely decided to send the heads in which such plans flourished, into Samson's wicker basket.

The tremendous mental shock into which the resemblance between the slain princess and my beloved one, who was always fleeing into the shadows of eternity, had given way in this prison to a feeling of desolate emptiness. And secretly blossomed in me, like a pale Asphodelos, the longing for the beloved image, which approached me in all kinds of forms, leaving me to follow into the unexplored realm, where her eternal home

was. Without any excitement I thought of the probability of my end. The hand on my pocket watch, which I found in my vest with the glass broken, measured the last hours of my life in the circle of numbers. For a long time I watched the Arabic numerals on the white disc, adorned with a wreath of cheerful roses, and thought that by one of the sixty strokes, or between two of them, a sharp, short pain would fly through my throat and extinguish my thoughts. With unheard-of clarity I saw my headless torso in this badly battered brown suit lying and twitching on the board, with two intermittently leaping fountains of blood in place of the head, and this roll into the basket of the Executioner. I looked at this shuddering self-image so calmly, as if the thing didn't concern me at all.

The addiction of the ladies for entertainment also in the present place of stay soon snatched me from this sinking, and I was compelled to answer all sorts of questions about my early life, my adult life, my family and any adventures I might have had in Paris. With graceful ease things were touched upon of which I had not been accustomed to speak of for a long time and whose description was embarrassing to me. But I soon saw that the interest of the women was not as insistent as one would have expected from the graceful eagerness of the questioning.

Everything that was done and talked about here had only one purpose, to fill the gloomy and hopeless days that lay before the sad end in the most distracting and entertaining way possible. Some gentlemen dressed in the office of the *maitre de plaisir* immediately offered, if someone covered himself in a thoughtful silence, everything they had to dispel the contagious gloom. They danced minuets and gavotte, practiced the almost lost pavane, sang, arranged games of forfeits and blind man's bluff, played a little music and excelled in piquant anecdotes and joking questions. This way of getting through the slowly creeping time, I did not like much in my serious mood, but I also accepted it. Even more unpleasant were the pleasures of longing of a young count, who, with many sighs of regret for the time when one of his distinguished relatives in Normandy to pass the time had shot a rooftop worker from the castle tower. Another gentleman who seemed to be of the same mind as him praised the glory of the days when a member of his family had been invited by Louis the thirteenth to a feast, and when, after the hunt, his feet were frozen the bodies of two peasants were cut open on the spot so that he could warm his cold feet in them.

With such speeches, I did not know what I should marvel at more: the blindness of people who even thought of such conditions of existence, or the unspeakable patience of the people, who had remained subject to such extremes, the taking away of the last piece of bread. Despite my disgust against the beasts of the street it became obvious to me once again that in this country under horrible convulsions and according to laws, which only God knew, a necessity was taking place, which was nothing other than the consequences of the causes for which these two thoughtless ones still mourned. The tender women in this dungeon, the old men, among whom was the Count Merigno, who was known for his charity, I felt sorry for most of them with all my heart. But among them were also those people who had nothing but a conceited disdain and insolent contempt for those who were not noble born, who had no knowledge of neither the sciences nor the arts and didn't think of anything at all, unless in the service of their indulgent and gallant needs; their fate could not be called unjust. And I felt strangely solemn and peculiar, when I discovered on the wall, written in red chalk, the words: "Counted, weighed and found too light.

In the late afternoon hours, when the room became more and more relaxed, the outlines of all things blurred and only a small candle stump burned in one corner, laughter and speech gradually lowered. Several who seemed to be familiar with each other, whispered all sorts of things that were not meant for the general public. The wretched food in the unclean bowls, which two turnkeys carried in on a board was, as far as it was noticed, quickly gulped down, and the empty vessels were taken away as they had come. After this many stretched out with sighs on the plank beds or on the brick floor to escape into the freedom of dreams and others, whispering prayers, moved their lips and let the beads of the rosaries they had brought with them slide through their fingers.

I had sat down, tired and with my head still aching, and by stroking with my finger tips, tried to reduce the lump that had been left by the blow, the force of which had caused me to fall. Then, out of the groups, unrecognizable in the twilight, a man emerged, carrying a stool in his hand and sat down on it with me.

"At the risk of disturbing your meditations, I would like to ask you, with your kind permission, a few more serious questions, the answers to which I am very anxious to hear."

With a quiet unwillingness I tried to recognize the facial features of the interrupter. But I could only determine that he was no longer young and that his white and very narrow hands were folded around his knee.

"I am glad to be at your service," I said quietly, so as not to disturb the deepening silence.

The unknown man moved with his stool close to me and whispered, as it seemed to me, in some agitation:

"All of us, who are here, so far as human calculation is correct, will be sentenced to death in a few days. In the certainty that our life, which would lead anyway to annihilation will now be completed more quickly than nature demands, there is nothing frightening for me. Another question worries me, my lord. What happens, when the path of life, which leads from the brain to the most distant and smallest parts of the body, is cut by the axe?"

"Any doctor can tell you," I answered.

"What happens is what we call death."

"What we call it!" hissed the stranger close to me. "But have you never heard that the severed heads are still alive? Do you know that they move the eyes, the hairs stand up straight against the walls of the basket? That they look in the direction of the caller, when their name is called, and form clearly recognizable words with their lips when they are asked? How? Come to me, esteemed one, but not with Doctor Galvani's frog. Here we are talking about the ability to think, to be conscious--"

"The problem is idle in a higher sense," I said, "even if we assume that the cut-off head still thinks and tries to act, this lasts only a few seconds as a result of the lack of blood supply. Then the standstill is there."

The man slid his stool even closer.

"Good, good," he said excitedly. "Let's not bother with that. It is indeed of little importance. What however, is death? Is it the death of the body and the freedom of the soul, or are the body and the soul so much together that one dies with the other? Can you give me a comforting answer?"

The last words sounded like a plea. It had become completely quiet in our dungeon, and nothing could be heard but the stomping of the guards in front of the windows and a soft whistling, the breath of the sleepers.

"Since you seem to be interested in the opinion of a stranger, I will answer you. Now then, my dear Herr, I believe that after death, the soul is

separated from the body and enters the eternal life from which it comes," I said in a muffled voice.

He shook his head vigorously.

"The priests of all creeds say such things. But no one can imagine what they are really saying. What do you mean: Return to eternity? Without the artful apparatus of the brain, the soul is incapable of expressing itself. What becomes of it? A vortex of air, a cloud of smoke, transparent ether? Where does it go?"

"It goes into a new vessel."

I felt as if someone else was speaking out of me. I had never thought this thought, and yet now it was there as if I had always carried it within me.

The other laughed unwillingly.

"Into a new vessel, that is, a new body! Here is already the absurdity. The number of departed are so great that not even a thousand of them can find a new home."

I listened to the inner voice.

"Whoever can preserve the consciousness of his earthly existence beyond death will be reborn in a human body. That is my belief."

"And if it succeeds - how often would such a return have to take place?"

"As often as needed until the soul is purified," I replied, moved.

"And then?"

"Then the soul rests consciously in God."

The man struck his knees with his fist.

"Always the same old stories! Purified! Pure! And the hatred? The burning greed for revenge, the rage beyond the end, the hope to retaliate a thousand fold?"

"These are all impurities that must fall off," I repeated what my inner voice said. "In the purification of purgatory -"

"Purgatory?" he cried out. "You talk like a Catholic priest. - Where is it supposed to be, this fabulous purgatory?"

"Here, it is life. Life in human form or -"

"Or?"

"Or in the body of an animal," I said, and saw in my mind's eye how tears were streaming from the parrot's ugly spherical eyes.

"But these are theories. I want certainty -", my late companion insistently demanded.

"There is only one certainty: that of feeling."

"Faith, then, my lord."

It was I who spoke thus.

"Fairy tales, my lord, fairy tales. I will tell you what is after death: nothing is. And that's the terrible thing, this extinction of being. To have never been! It is horrible. And I don't need to believe in it. I know it."

"I'm sorry I couldn't bring you more comfort," I said, and was seized with intense pity.

"It is my fault," he defended me politely. "A few days ago I spoke to 'Abbe Gautier before he was executed. An old man with white hair, a worthy priest. He was struggling to find a hunchbacked quack- who had been convicted of common crimes, and pointed him to the infinite, eternal goodness of God. But the Italian with the hump would have nothing of it and kept shouting:

"Niente! - Finito -nulla. Nix immortalita - o Dio, Dio!"

"Then why did God call upon him?" I asked.

"Out of habit, I guess. That good Abbe Gautier said about the same thing as you. I envy him and you. Sleep well!"

He slipped into a dark corner with his stool. I heard him sigh deeply.

A bunch of keys jingled. The iron door creaked open. The sleepers groaned unwillingly, turned around, and muttered unintelligible words.

A turnkey, carrying a large, dimly burning lantern, entered, and followed by a commissar with a tricolor sash. Carefully he examined the paper that the official had handed to him, and then called out half aloud:

"Citizen Dronte!"

I stood up and saw the commissar make a violent movement of surprise or of joy. He took the lantern from the overseer's hand, motioned for him to stop at the door, and came quickly towards me.

"I am Commissar Cordeau!," he said hastily and quietly.

It was Magister Hemmetschnur whom I had taken from Krottenriede.

"I can only stay for a minute," he repeated in a monotonous, indifferent voice, while the lantern in his hand clinked and trembled.

"I went to all the prisons when I found your name on the list. This is the last one. I know everything. As many of the cursed Aristocrats I have

sent to the Orkus. I would go back to being the poor miserable Hemmetschnur on Krottenriede if I could save your noble life, which is so dear to me. Do not move, do not speak. There are spies in every dungeon, even here. I've spoken to the chairman of your tribunal. The charge is false. It was not your intention to free Lamballe, but rather as a loyal supporter of the Republic, you wanted to prevent the ignorant people from a rash act through which the discovery and exploration of the dangerous plans in which the princess was involved are now forever impossible to determine. They will believe you. You were providing an important function that will protect you forever. Do not move your head. You must accept. Otherwise, you will be lost. If you have not understood me, clasp your hands together as if pleading. You don't? So you have understood everything. Now a necessary comedy begins. Do not be frightened of me, who would like to kiss your hand." And with a loud voice he continued, "So you refuse? You want to know the whereabouts of the escaped traitor? Good. You will stand in front of your judges tomorrow. Don't forget that the lictors' bundle also contains a hatchet."

Seemingly angrily, he stomped up and waved at the turnkey.

"Citizen Gaspard! You're liable to me for this dangerous person!"

The turnkey shone his light in my face and grinned:

"This head is loose! I'm getting the hang of this thing, Citizen Commissar!"

Laughing, the magister slapped him on the shoulder, and they both left the dungeon. The door slammed shut with a thud, the key rattled.

"Francois!" scolded one in his sleep. "See, which of the cursed peasants drives over the inner yard."

Then there was silence. The darkness dripped down like pitch.

Before me in the darkness I saw the face of Isa Bektshi. The kind gaze was directed at me. The narrow scar between the eyebrows shone like the dawn.

"I will not lie," I said to myself.

I saw nothing but the black night and I stretched out on the thin straw of the floor to rest a little. After breakfast, which the turnkey brought in on his board, a commissar appeared with several soldiers and brought three of us, including me, to the court session.

A young, pretty woman, who had mostly been sitting on a cot, crying, and had received little notice by the ladies in my prison, was brought in

with me and a tall, very haughty looking man in a dark blue, gold-embroidered jacket and white stockings was led away. The name of my fated companion I had not understood when I was introduced yesterday. The only thing that struck me was the deference with which the aristocratic prisoners had treated him, and his careless, condescending manner with which he had spoken a few words to this one, then to that one, while he hardly noticed me. I was walking behind these two, the woman and the haughty man; I was walking alone between two soldiers who had been specially commanded to guard me. We were led through a narrow, terribly dirty alley, in which all kinds of garbage rotted, to an old building, over the archway of which fluttered the three-color flag. Then we reached a corridor into a low, very large room, and had to pass behind a freshly painted cabinet, smelling of fresh oil paint and then stopped.

The inner elevation, in which I had spent yesterday evening, was gone from me. The thought that this day was to be one of my last lay heavy as lead on me and filled me with a dull ache. Even the inanimate objects around me took on a strange and unfamiliar ghostly form, and even the early morning light that shone through the dirty windows had a mysterious reddish glow.

When a soldier motioned for us to sit down, I was given the seat between the young woman, who from time to time sobbed violently, and the gentleman in the blue jacket, who looked before him with a stern and unapproachable face, without paying any attention to anyone. Now and then he would pull out of his pocket a gold can in the shape of a pear and sniffed it with an extremely affected movement. In front of us stood a heavy table with carved legs, on which everything necessary for writing was piled up. On the walls lolled pale, long-haired soldiers, some of them wearing wooden shoes on their bare feet, and blowing foul-smelling tobacco smoke from their lime pipes. They only changed their comfortable position, when a rumbling drum roll outside the door announced the entrance of the revolution tribunal.

We were compelled to stand and wait until the judges were seated at the large table. I looked at the men who presumed to decide on the duration of the lives of others. The first at the table on the left was a craftsman with badly cleaned, hands, whose imprint was visible on the rim of his red cap. In the middle between him and a constantly coughing, obviously sickly person with pointed, gray-yellow face, was enthroned a black-haired young

man of peculiarly impudent, but not unhandsome appearance. His restless, dark eyes sparkled under strong brows, and his long, carefully stranded hair under the two-cornered hat hung down to his shoulders. He stretched his legs, clad in white pants and boots with cuffs, far under the table, waved to an acquaintance in the densely packed area in the back of the room, and then rummaged with a pile of files that lay in front of him. Then he spoke a few half-loud words to the sitters and to the skinny clerk at the narrow end of the table, propped his elbows on the tabletop, rested his chin on his clasped hands and looked at us in turn with a look that seemed to command the highest respect.

Only when complete silence had fallen in the background he leaned back in his armchair, so that the blue-white-red sash wrapped around his body tightened, took a sheet of paper from the table, as if playing, and said with a singing and theatrical voice:

"Citizen Anastasia Beaujonin!"

Loud murmuring, throat clearing and spitting out behind us betrayed the now beginning tension of the audience.

The young woman next to me had let out a small scream at the mention of her name. She stood up, burst into a new torrent of tears and pressed a tiny handkerchief to her eyes. I looked at her pityingly. Her pretty dress, pink and blue flowered, was badly wrinkled and disfigured. Several times she ran with her hand, smoothing out the wrinkles. Surely the appearance of her person preoccupied her just as much as the concern about the outcome of a trial that knew neither witnesses nor in its deliberate brevity offered little hope.

The chairman assumed a significant posture, made a beautiful gesture with his right hand, and spoke with an emphasis as if he wanted to declaim:

"Pay attention to what I say, Citizen Beaujonin! Think about your answers, because our time is short. It does not belong to us, but to the nation. You are accused of keeping Baron Hautecorne hidden in the attic of your house for three days although you must have known that he belonged among the proscribed. What do you have to reply?"

"Oh, my God," the woman stammered. "I loved him so much -- -"

The judge smiled. From behind one heard a coarse woman's voice:

"She is brave, the little one, and speaks as a woman should speak."

"Silence, Mother Flanche!" shouted the judge. "You must not make any remarks here!"

"Don't break anything, my sweet boy!" it came back. "I have known you since you were a Temple singer."

The chairman was about to start up, but then only made a dismissive gesture with his hand and said, turning to the young woman, "So?"

She swallowed a few times and directed her shy, fearful gaze on me for a moment, as if she were trying to get courage from me. This seemed to annoy the judge, because he took a petition and knocked violently on the table with it.

"And why did you love citizen Hautecorne so much?" he asked mockingly, showing his white teeth.

"Because he was so beautiful-almost as beautiful as you!" She said softly, looking at him with a full gaze.

A storm of applause, mixed with shouts, laughter and the trampling of feet roared through the hall.

Even the committee members smiled sourly, and the chairman stroked back a curl of hair that had fallen across his forehead with a smug movement.

"Let the little girl go - -," cried one.

"She needs her head to give it to you-," they laughed.

"Well said, Rodolphe."

"She knows how you men must be treated."

When silence had returned, the Judge said in a gentle voice:

"Madame, I have reason to believe that you were unaware of the danger of this enemy of the Republic when your assistance was rendered?"

"Oh - no," sobbed the accused, quickly grasping her advantage. "I love the Republic -. I would have never --"

"Did he at least do his thing well, your baron?" roared one of the audience.

The judge struck the butt of the file angrily.

"Hey, now, Perrin, Verrou, and Mastiche, see who's trying to make my acquaintance back there!" he shouted, and at once three soldiers stumbled into the background, their heavy rifles in their arms.

Immediately there was silence.

The judge leaned toward the committee members. They whispered and nodded to him.

"Madame," then said the presiding judge, "I will dare to set you at liberty for the time being. But take care!"

"Oh -" the woman cried out and laughed all over her face.

"Wait Madame. I want to take it upon myself. I have a responsibility to answer to the nation. You see, the people are mild and chivalrous to women, if that is possible. Before you leave you will have the goodness to write your future address on a piece of paper and hand it to me!"

"Oh, you damned truffle pig," laughed one of them. The soldiers spoke fiercely at him.

"I'll say no more," he assured them. "Let go of my paws!"

Silence fell again.

The little girl smiled gracefully, pattered on her high heels to the tribune table and scribbled a few words on a piece of paper, which the judge held out to her, read and pocketed. Suppressed laughter in the auditorium accompanied this action.

"You may go, Madame, but you will remain at the Tribunal's disposal!"

The woman stopped, looked sheepishly and uncertainly at the judges and then at the laughing spectators, turned suddenly and ran quickly, looking neither to the right nor to the left, right through the middle of the dumbfounded looking soldiers and out of the room.

Immediately, the chairman assumed a dreadful official face, rustled with paper and then said briefly and sharply:

"Citizen Melchior Dronte!"

I stood up.

Everything in me was calm, all fear disappeared. Again, I felt as if I were now contemplating a fate, whose further development was completely clear to me. Without any hostility I looked at the vain man who had set himself as a judge over me. His gaze immediately met mine and passed me by. In order to hide this weakness, he took his eyes off me and taking some sheets from the table acted as if he needed a constant insight into the act, which would explain the circumstances of my capture and the charges against me.

At last he raised his head and said:

"In the case of an expression of the will of the people, which was directed against the rightfully detested citizen Lamballe ---"

A many-voiced outburst of rage arose.

"Death to the aristocrat! Down with her!"

"Shut your mouths!"

"She's already perished!"

"Death to Lamballe!"

The judge waited patiently for the noise to subside, and then continued:

"- The detested citizen Lamballe, from whom important information about a conspiracy in England against the republic were to be hoped for, has been crushed by the holy wrath of the citizens. You, citizen Dronte, have made the attempt to obstruct the people, who were passing and carrying out its judgment. What were your intentions with the way you handled this?"

"I wanted to protect the defenseless woman," I said, looking him in the eye. He shook his head reluctantly.

There was a murmur.

"Are you a friend of freedom?"

I thought for a moment and then answered the question with a "yes."

"Was it known to you that citizen Lamballe had fled to England and returned from there to Paris?"

"Yes."

"In that case, it was reasonable to assume that there was valuable information about her co-conspirators located here that could be obtained. Not so?"

I was silent.

He looked at me again with a quiet, disapproving head movement and with a tongue-lashing spoke slowly and clearly, emphasizing each word:

"I know what you are trying to say, Citizen Dronte. In your zeal to serve the republic and prevent a premature and early end of the traitor, you have sought to use violence to prevent the execution of the sentence. However, you fared badly enough. Is that so? Give me answer!"

He nodded an almost imperceptible "yes" and waited.

I felt briefly and strongly the lure to return to freedom from the horror of this justice. But a powerful, insurmountable feeling inside me made the friendly images of imminent freedom quickly fade away. I realized, like a holy necessity, that I had to be hard and merciless against myself, otherwise I should be thrown back into levels from which I had ascended and not allowed to higher ones whose aura I had attained.

"I have tried to save the princess on the basis of feelings of a personal nature!"

The chairman heaved a sigh of annoyance, swayed his head, drummed on the table and raised his eyes to the ceiling. The committee members looked at me bored, and in the auditorium a yawning voice said:

"These are quibbles, Jeannot - Do you understand any of it?"

"In a nutshell: you had no intention of protecting the woman as such, but rather to render a service to the Republic. We have no time, Citizen Dronte, and I hope that your sincere admission of this fact will settle the case!"

A cold breath passed over my face. The scales stood: a lie had to sink the bowl —

"I did not think of the Republic in my deed!"

Now it was spoken.

Great unrest arose. Even the drowsiest among the listeners understood, awakened to irritated attention. The face of the chairman turned red with anger. He threw his head back so that his hair flew and hissed at me:

"You dare tell me that?"

"It is the truth," I replied.

It was clear to me that the grateful magister must have had his hand in this, and it saddened me that his not without danger effort had now been in vain. But I had to follow the path that my innermost feeling was the right one, to go to the end, regardless of the feelings that arise from the body's instinct for self-preservation.

The behavior of the chairman changed immediately. A deep vertical wrinkle appeared between his eyebrows, and he bit his lips angrily before continuing the interrogation.

"You are a stranger. For what purpose did you come to Paris?"

"To become acquainted with the Revolution and its aims-."

"With friendly or hostile intent?"

"I did not come with hostile intentions."

"You are a baron. - How can an aristocrat's opinion of the Revolution be otherwise than hostile?" suddenly the bilious committee member intervened.

"Does such a person love the poor people -?" growled the one with the stained red cap. "How?" he turned to me.

"I love all the people."

"These are sayings such as every priest has in his pocket who stands before the tribunal," the judge snapped at me and assumed a frowning pose with a lurking look at me. "You have thus joined the brave ones who have gone the Lamballe way, not in the interest of the state, but in order to protect the queen's intimate for some other dark motive."

"Don't make such long stories!" grumbled someone behind me.

"He's one of the whore's lovers, nothing else!"

Shrill whistles sounded.

Wild stomping of feet revealed that the people wanted an end.

The skinny man talked to the chairman. The latter shrugged and turned to the other committee member, who nodded his head vigorously, raised his right hand and dropped it with the edge on the table. It was clearly understandable what he meant by this.

The chairman stood up, stretched out his right hand toward me like a king of the theater, while the left hand rested on his heart, and spoke with his voice low and rolling the R's:

"Citizen Dronte is guilty of treason against the Republic!"

Thunderous clapping of hands resounded. I sat down, completely calm and certain of the end.

Then the man in the dark blue, gold-embroidered jacket slowly turned his stern and stony face toward me, smiled and said very loudly and audibly:

"Allow me, Baron, to express to you my sincere esteem!"

Laughter and jeering followed his words. An apple case flew past my head and remained in front of the judge's table.

The theatrical chairman slammed his fist on the table and shouted, "Quiet!"

Gradually, the scolding, laughing and whistling ceased.

"Citizen Carmignac!" rang out the complacent voice.

The man in the blue jacket stood up.

"I am Philipp Anton Maria Marquis of Carmignac, Pair of France, Privy Councillor of His Majesty the King, Chairman of the Breton Chamber of Nobility, Commander of the Order of Louis ---"

The hall cheered. This tall man and his proud manner promised a spectacle. The emphasis on his rank even evoked a certain respect.

"He looks well, the marquis," someone said.

"But his neck is as thin as that of Lamballe's lover," laughed in response.

"Curses! And the thing is settled."

The marquis took a pinch from his little gold pear and carefully patted his brocade vest with a small lace cloth to clean off the tobacco dust.

"You are accused of -," began the presiding chairman.

"Above all," said the nobleman with inimitable haughtiness, "I wish to make the declaration that the privileges to which I am entitled have been violated with unlawful violence and I was brought here by unlawfully armed persons. Now, as to this court I note that it is not made up of royal courtiers, but of a bad actor, a master carpenter and a runaway servant of the church, "and therefore offers no cause for further consideration."

After these words the marquis sat down, contemptuously staring into the air.

For a few seconds there remained silence. The stupefaction was general. But then arose such a thunderous noise, such a roar of anger that the soldiers present were hardly able to hold back the frenzied crowd. Meanwhile, the presiding judge stood up. One saw him waving his hands urgently to call for silence. It took long enough for him to make himself understood. He directed an angry, scornful look at the count, who looked past him equanimously.

"Citizen Carmignac, I demand that you stand up before I have to use violence and give the tribunal of the people the homage it deserves."

The marquis shrugged his shoulders and nonchalantly stood up on his feet.

"I do not wish to get dirt stains on my jacket," he said. "For this I rise."

The actor sat down and pushed his chin forward.

"If I understand you correctly, Citizen Carmignac, you fell asleep before the revolution and still haven't awakened, eh?"

The mocked man made no reply. Some people in the hall laughed.

"You have made an attempt to bribe the turnkey of the Temple to give Citizen Capet, who is kept there, information on the successes of the emigrants at the Austrian and the Prussian court, by means of a small piece of paper concealed in a gold case, which was hidden in one of six lemons. Is it this case?"

The hand of the judge was holding a tiny gold case of elongated shape. The marquis measured it under half-closed lids.

"Since you are playing court here, you will have to go to the trouble of proving your accusations."

The displeasure in the room grew noticeably.

"He shall be embraced by Samson's coquette!" roared the voice of one of the angriest screamers.

The courtiers bowed their heads to each other, whispered, nodded, the chairman stood up and without any movement pronounced his "guilty".

The court rose. Four soldiers stepped in to us and told us to stand up. It was fairly quiet as we were led out of the hall. The people were satisfied.

When we stepped out of the door, where a new troop of anxious, well-guarded people of both sexes were waiting to be interrogated, I felt something angular in my right palm, like a piece of folded paper, and closed my fingers tightly around it.

We were going a different way than the one that had brought us here from the prison, under an open portcullis, and finally found ourselves in a spacious, dry and bright cellar. It was full of people.

I went near one of the windows, unfolded the paper and read:

"My heart weeps for the best and noblest of men; yet I bow before a heroism that respects death less than the betrayal of itself. My now impotent gratitude will forever honor your memory. May there be a reunion that gives you new goals."

It was the well-known handwriting of the magister.

In the dim morning light we could see through the windows, which were high up but clean and bright, that a fine rain was falling outside. Drops hung sparkling on the iron bars of the lattice.

This dungeon, admittedly the last one in which we were housed, was in every respect friendlier than the gloomy coal mine where we had awaited our sentencing. A bow-legged jailer with a good-natured face and a natural gift for joking words, brought us washing water in wooden cans and lent us clean, coarse cloths to dry our faces and hands. For those prisoners who still had money on them, he provided chocolate for breakfast and pieces of cake. The others were given a soup of burnt rye flour and a large slice of bread.

Since everything seemed trivial to me that was still connected with the needs of the body, I was content with a few spoonfuls of soup. Also in

these last hours of my life, I sometimes felt as if I were completely outside the events and saw from afar, like an observer, me and my fellow sufferers. Nevertheless, this observing being, which was my ego, was connected by a guiding thread with my body, and felt the morning chill, hunger and that dull, constricting feeling in the stomach area, which precedes bad events. This strange out-of-myself sensation was so strong that my own hands seemed like something foreign, for I looked at them closely and with a strange feeling as if I were seeing something familiar again after a long time. In all these ambivalent feelings was mixed with a kind of regret over the ingratitude, with which the soul calmly left forever, the house in which it had been for so long and through whose senses it had taken in the image of its changing surroundings. I could not, try as I might, find anything great or decisive in the imminent departure from the accustomed form of earthly life. It was as if the body, although its sensations continued, no longer participated in those of the soul.

Even the scenes that took place around me could not move me violently, as much as I was aware of their sadness. Something constantly stirred in me, as if I had to speak to the poor people and tell them that all this was only of secondary importance and that it did not really have to mean much. But it was also completely clear to me that they would not have understood me at all, and so I kept silent and out of the way.

Many things happened around me. Women wept bitterly and their hot tears, with which they said goodbye to life, dripped into the soup bowls from which they ate. The Marquis de Carmignac sat in a corner and had his beard shaved and his hair arranged. A withered, weary smiling old man read to a small crowd of listeners from the "Consolations of Philosophy" by Boethius. A handsome young man in a riding suit leaned against a pillar with rapt eyes and hummed a little song over and over again, which was obviously dear to him as a memory. He stopped only when an Abbe, who was whispering prayers with several older and younger ladies, approached him and politely asked him not to disturb the religious gathering of the dying. Several sat dully, despairingly and completely absorbed in themselves on the straw mattresses of the beds that were set up here.

After some time, a young, pale-looking barber's assistant entered with the jailer, waved to his comrade, who was taking the marquis' tip with many bows and with a trembling voice asked the people present to sit down in turn on a bench placed in the middle of the room, to have their hair cut. This

request caused loud sobs and a fit of fainting, but the toilet, as the procedure was called for short, proceeded swiftly. The long tresses of the ladies, which were carefully cut off and placed in a small basket, he very politely requested them to be considered useful for his business, and presented each woman who gave her consent, a small vial of smelling salts as a return gift.

The frosty, rattling and moving of the scissor also touched my neck, and their blades cut through my hair. Coldly I felt the lack.

All around, the praying grew louder and more fervent. At eight o'clock a booming drum rattled and the door opened. In front of a crowd of soldiers, a commissar with a sash appeared and read off name after name from a list. All those named rose immediately and lined up to the left of the door.

"Citizen Melchior Dronte!"

I bowed briefly to those who obviously remained behind, and stood next to a tall, strong man who, with a contemptuous expression, derisively pushed his chin forward. By his braids and lapels and the uniform, I recognized him as a major of the Broglie regiment.

"Skunks - riffraff from the gutter!" he growled and spat out so violently that a small, hungry-looking soldier jumped to the side, startled.

A somewhat lopsided, gray-clad man with a mocking face, who was one of those called up, laughed softly to himself.

"This carnival play will soon be over. And it wasn't even very funny."

We were now; about twenty in number, led out of the cellar, went up the stairs and came to a courtyard that was completely surrounded by soldiers. It was still trickling thinly from the cloudy sky. Some ladder wagons were standing there, and we were ordered to sit on the boards nailed across. A boy of about fifteen years old climbed up behind us and tied our hands behind our backs with strong vine cords, supervised by a mounted sergeant. I saw that the young lad whispered something in the ear of each person whom he bound. And when it came to my turn, I heard from behind, half-breathed, while the warm breath hit my shivering neck, the words:

"Forgive me!"

I felt how restless and hot the hands were that bound my arms.

Amidst much shouting, running to and fro, and up and down trotting of the cavalry escort the wagons were finally loaded with their human cargo. Next to the coachman, a soldier swung himself onto the bench and

the big door of the courtyard opened with a loud creak. Incalculable masses of people filled the street outside and formed two rows, between which our carts now slowly began to roll.

Quietly, I looked around me. In front of me, stiffly erect and looking over the people, sat the Marquis de Carmignac, next to him the major of the Broglie regiment, who, with his furiously lowered red head reminded of an irritated bull. Crouched on the bench next to me was an obviously deranged man, about sixty years old, with white beard stubble, a wrinkled face and rolling eyes, who was intoning incessant incantations to himself.

"O Astaroth, O Typhon, O ye seven fiery dragons, you, O keeper of the seals, hasten to help me! Let flames fall upon them, let the earth open up and take them to the lowest hell, but carry me to the garden of the white Ariel Arizoth Araman Arihel Adonai."

The words became unintelligible, and at last he burst into a triumphant giggle and became calm, obviously firmly convinced of the sure effect of his spirit invocation.

I turned my head with difficulty to the back bench and caught sight of an aging girl with brick-red spots on her cheekbones, who was dressed in a black robe, with her eyes turned to Heaven, praying without ceasing. Beside this nun, who with glowing eyes, was preparing for martyrdom, trembled like a jelly, a white-flour covered baker, whose swollen, puffy eyes gazed out of a hot face in which mortal fear gaped. His huge belly, which almost burst the buttons of the trousers, wobbled back and forth with every step of the horses.

I saw excessively clearly, and not the slightest detail escaped me. I noticed a hanging silver button on the jacket of the marquis. On the neck of the major an inflamed pustule. On the vest of the man sitting next to me the remains of an egg dish, and the medals on the nun's rosary sometimes clinked against a board of the cart.

My poor body, which was now to change, was doing everything in its power to keep the calm serenity of the spirit that was preparing to leave busy with unimportant worries on its way into eternity. A natural need, for the satisfaction of which there was no time left to satisfy, arose with annoying agony. An old cold pain which had not tormented me for a long time, had shot into my right hip during the night and caused me great agony with the shocks of the cart. And to all this was added the fear of death that the body felt. It manifested itself in strong stomach pains and finally

brought it to the point that cold drops ran down my face. It was cold sweat, death sweat...

But I stood above or beside these sensations which, in spite of their strength, could no longer really penetrate to the consciousness. A sharp and irrevocable divorce between body and soul had occurred, and the soul realized with joy that no earthly feeling would accompany it on its way.

From the crowd a song burst forth in full chords, into which thousands of voices fell. The truly entrancing melody, the words of which I could not understand, except for "Fatherland", "tyranny" and the like, had a strong and moving effect on me. It was a genuine and noble-born, fiery child of the time, and it was as if this rapturous singing carried something hot in it.

Everywhere people were looking out of the windows of the suburban houses, joining in the song with bright, enthusiastic voices and waving their scarves. The horses in front of our wagon, a chestnut and a summer black, neighed and began to prance and nod their heads in time with the mighty tune, which was glowing and storming up to the sky. Even the driver, a scowling man, and the young soldier next to him sang the hymn, for such it was, with a loud voice.

The way was not too long. I looked once more with the old eyes that had seen so much during my existence, and enjoyed the colorful multiplicity of the images that showed themselves to me. I saw the butcher with a steaming, scalded pig in a wooden trough, and the brass basins of a barber, which rattled in the wind and rain and hung full of little drops. I took the pitying look of two dark, beautiful girl's eyes under a blue and white bonnet, noticed a black dog that reminded me of poor Diana, and smelled the strong, sour-tart smell of fresh tan, coming from a tanner's workshop. A steel blue fly with little glass wings sat down on my knees and thus traveled quite a distance without effort of its own. A bunch of funny screaming spiders, uninvolved in humanity threw themselves like a brown cloud over the smoking mountain of horse manure, which came from one of the front wagons, and an ancient sycamore tree, all hung with water beads, morosely and indifferently let us pass by.

And then, with a jerk, all the wagons stopped.

We had arrived at the ugly square, where not long ago I had spoken with the young officer about the French nation, and my gaze fell on the

gaunt reddish-brown scaffold that towered high above our heads, with ghastly simplicity.

At that moment the wall of fog broke, and a pale ray of sunlight fell with dull glint on the slanting knife high up under the crossbeam.

"How soon all this will be over!" I thought, and remembered so many moments of impatience and not being able to wait, which lay far behind me in the old days.

We had to descend, and we were helped to do so. The people did not shout. There was only that quiet murmur of a thousand voices that betrayed the excitement of a great crowd. No one shouted swear words at us, and many eyes looked sympathetically. I had the feeling that with such a general mood, the great killings would soon subside and finally stop altogether. My knees were stiff from sitting and from the morning chill. The distress of the body cramps set in once again, and the right hip was very painful when walking.

I saw people appear on the platform, appearing to move. The knife fell with a dull clang and was raised again. It was red. Something struck the boards of the bloody scaffold.

The fear of the body almost gained the upper hand. A thought pushed forward, gained space: To do something to save myself, to scream, to beg, to break through the crowd, to break the cords...

That's when I saw him...

Huddled like a bat. Fangerle. He was sitting on a lantern of the gallows, grimly distorting his wide mouth, the evil yellow eyes directed at me, a red, Phrygian cap on his skull instead of a big hat. His eyes were like two wasps that lived and crawled around in the cavities of his head.

I closed my eyes. My will kept the upper hand.

"Return to the depths!" I said to myself.

When I looked again with all my strength, the apparition had disappeared, the pole was empty.

A soldier grasped me almost timidly by the arm and pushed me forward with gentle force. I saw how clotted, thick blood flowed sluggishly down the boards of the scaffolding. Before me the Marquis de Carmignac climbed the slippery little stairs. Two men with naked arms grabbed him, strapped him to the board, and tipped it over. The upper part of the wood, which enclosed the neck, lowered. Whoosh...

A whistling sound came from his headless neck. The feet with the buckled shoes, manly still in death, softly tapped the ground, his body moved in the straps, as if he wanted to make himself more comfortable. They loosened the damp leather, rolled him aside; the golden pear rolled over the boards, a little lid opened, brown snuff dusted out. Quickly a hand reached for the shiny thing.

I was next, climbing the stairs.

A hand supported me kindly, saved me from a fall in a moment of slipping. I looked into a serious, well-cut face. It was Samson. He made a polite inviting hand gesture. Behind him stood the red-bristled monster.

Images circled in my brain in a flash. The arm with the executioner's sword in the witch's room of Krottenriede, the box with the singing little bird, burning candles in a black room, the glitter of Aglaja's crown of death, the little dead man with the hourglass and the scythe, as it tilted out of the old clock, the Bavarian Haymon as an Amicist ---Firm hands grabbed me by the arm. Faces slid past me. I stood at the board. The warm smell of blood rose to my nostrils, tickling and irritating in the nose. Thin straps snaked around my upper body, my legs. I fell forward -- it creaked softly around me, - pain- my larynx hit a semicircle.

I thought: Now the knife will cut through my throat, sawdust will fill my eyes, my mouth ---.

Wet wood descended on the back of my neck.

Isa Bektschi! Isa Bektschi!

With all my might I thought of the Ewli. I forced him to me.

Close to mine I saw his face - his mouth, as if he wanted to kiss me - kind, dark eyes, like two black suns. His gaze enclosed me with infinite love and promise.

I thought nothing more. I saw only him - drank his looks, absorbed his essence into me. Then dazzling, golden rays shot out from his eyes, piercing me, consuming me in fiery embers - in golden fire.

But still I saw that face, clearly, sharply, saw it growing smaller and smaller - small as a dot and yet recognizable -.

I opened my mouth, felt woody, dry splinters, moist chunks---

Then night -- hissing -- sound -- a painful tearing - a thread cut in two

I found myself outside my body. My body lay in its brown, rumped suit, without coat, with blood-soaked shirt edge on the board of the guillotine. Despite the tight straps, my upper body reared up a few times violently. Fountains of blood rushed out of the two large neck veins.

The head lay pale, with wide-open eyes in the basket. Its face smiled. All the people who were standing around the scaffold looked on in silence. The board became empty. The man who had called Astaroth and the fiery dragons was dragged up the steps. He struggled with all his might, kicking with his feet, snapping his teeth.

He did not want to - - All this was so indifferent for me. I rose and floated away over the many heads, glided effortlessly, and without finding any resistance, through the house walls and window panes, driven by a force.

I had no eyes and saw everything. I heard. But I felt nothing. I thought nothing either. I was consciousness itself. Everything came to me, was immediately recognized. Vibrations of many kinds trembled through me, without me feeling pleasure or suffering. It was coldness, warmth, a sound, light, phenomena for which there are no words in human language, sensations when encountering beings, that remain invisible and unknown to people.

I was of a shape, if this is possible to say, like those glassy-transparent bodies that glide past human eyes when they look for a long time into the distant pure blue heavens. Nevertheless I was not a body. I was also not nothing. I was a soul, like many of those who floated in the world space. But I had consciousness, I was mindful of my ego and I had a goal.

I was looking for a new house with those instruments of the senses, which received from outside and could reflect from the inner back to the outer: Could express thoughts as words. I was looking for a human body. Inside me I carried the tiny image of a noble, godlike face, the reflection of which I had taken with me into infinity when I left the destroyed body. From this image my consciousness extended along with the ability to remember.

The will for re-embodiment was the only drive that dominated me. According to inscrutable laws born of the eternity of becoming and passing, I strove towards my goal, devoid of all those feelings that can be called impatience, expectation or hope. There was no time; there was no distance and no obstacles.

Forces to which I surrendered of my own accord willingly lifted me up, made me sink down, and made me to fade away, to wander and to rest.

I was unmoved in my consciousness.

Everything was offered to me, nothing was hidden from me, and nothing was veiled, neither in depths nor in heights. The wind blew through me, the rain fell through me. I had nothing of the properties that things in space possess. I was big and small, inside and outside, far and near.

I saw sunsets in ocean wastelands, mountain hikers crashed in crevasses of ice, blue flowers that slowly withered, ghosts in waterfalls, beings that lived in crystals, red and yellow sandstorms, and fermenting garbage, out of which new creatures of the strangest kind sprang, dwarfs, who would have appeared as stones to human eyes, winged creatures that rode and roared, sleeping in beds, seeded with tiny goblins as with vermin, people, from whom evil flowed like a poisonous breath. I passed by all this.

There were animals in herds on vast steppes, animals in the air, in holes in the ground, in the water. Small, crawling, flying, running animals, animals of all kinds, covered with hair, feathers, scales, bristles and plates, living animals. They attracted me because they were alive. They begat young, hatched them, reproduced thousands of times.

They attracted me strongly, because they had living bodies, warm bodies. But I carried in me a human face and did not follow those souls, that lurked waiting to enter into the egg cell at the moment of conception.

I was only attracted to people. I was attracted to them by a tremendous force.

It was good to be with people. I attached myself to them, was with them, in them, slid through them and was a guest with others. I lived with them. I saw them as one sees a region that resembles the abandoned homeland. I have to use such comparisons, although the truth is quite different.

Over and over again they went about to create new life. They hid themselves from the others and became one. All beings, which were invisible to the people, but always surround them, retreated before the divine, which emanated from the procreators, however barren and poor they might otherwise be, as flawed and weak, but in this action they unleashed the elemental power of eternity, they were more powerful and greater than all other creatures. I was fervently attached to such pairs of people everywhere. In the black nomad tents of the steppes, in dim snow huts, in

thin beds, on haystacks, behind stacks of boards, in the bushes of the forest, on the straw mattresses of dull houses, in garrets and state rooms. In countless places, at secret hours of the day and night. The law was above me. I felt attracted and repelled, without grief, disappointment or impatience.

Once it happened, quicker than the lightning flared up.

At the union of two cells, the power of new life enclosed me. I was caught in tiny union, caught up in hot, red, radiant, working and pulsating being. I felt warmth, darkness, moisture, currents of nourishment, the rustling of creative forces. Blissful growth was in me.

Juices flowed through me; the thunder of unfolding and the soft crackling of becoming were around me. Consciousness became dim. Sleep enveloped it, happy, refreshing sleep. Torn and incoherent experiences passed through my dreams as unrecognizable silhouettes, disjointed and inaudible, ancient, lost, sinking memories.

I grew in slumber, stretched my limbs out comfortably, smacking with pleasure, stretched, moved softly in sleep. Delicate and precious organs, protected in bony armor, were formed in me, warm blood raced through me in rapid, throbbing beats, friendly tightness pressed me tenderly, moved me swaying, showing me the way to the light.

Crystal, cold, clear air rushed into my lungs.

Colorful, confused rays penetrated my eyes, confused sounds pressed into my ears. Everything happened to me that accompanies young life when it enters this world.

I was there. I was the one who had come back, the Ewli.

My name was Sennon Vorauf.

I had a father, a mother and other people who loved me. I learned to speak and walk, a child like other children. Everything was new to me, a great revelation.

Until the ability to look back into my past life.

This began with dreams of anxiety in childhood, which caused my good parents a lot of worry. But even when I was awake, I was not safe from sudden sinking. The memories of Melchior Dronte, the son of a nobleman in days long past, came back to me fiercely, and frightened me very much. Only slowly did I gain from myself the repetitive, chasing, and frightening memories and gradually put them together so that I could grasp

them as fragments of a former whole, which I called the life of Melchior Dronte, my former life.

Shaken by the horror of my parents (they often both sat by my bedside and listened, stunned by my wild fantasies, as they thought), I withdrew already in boyhood and showed myself to others as a strangely precocious, quiet and thoughtful child, who preferred to sit alone staring with open eyes.

My new life was suitable for such thoughtfulness. My parents, good-hearted and simple people, had, following a custom of the country, named me "Sennon" after one of the two saints of my birthday and loved me more than anything. After ten years of childless marriage, I was the eagerly awaited "gift from heaven" sent to them. In the first years of my life, I had, as already mentioned often caused them great fear and worry. Thus I had once fell into severe convulsions when, by accident, I was present when a few boys threw stones at a black dog, so that it ran away howling. To an aunt, who loved me tenderly, I did not want to go to her until the squawking parrot, which she had in her apartment was removed.

Sometimes one, such as the reader of this book, understandably took these behaviors for stubbornness and punished me mildly. The patience and the lack of any consciousness of guilt, with which I accepted the gentle punishments, however, soon made it completely impossible for the good-hearted to act against me in such a way.

Especially my mother, who despite her low status was an unusually sensitive Frau, who with her trained intuition, recognized better than my father, that all the violent emotional expressions of her child must indicate quite unusual mental processes which ruled out any crude influence. I clearly remember a Sunday afternoon, when I was with her in a garden filled with the deep glow of the autumn sun. She had cut flowers to put in a vase. The arrangement of the copper, blue, white and fire-yellow Georgiana flowers she had made suddenly seized me in a very peculiar way, and without being able to explain where these words came from, I said completely lost in a dream and quietly to myself:

"Aglaja also arranged them like this".

Then my mother looked at me with a very strange, shy look, stroked her hand over my hair and said to me:

"You must have once loved her very much -."

We then spoke nothing for a long time, until it became completely dark. Then mother heaved a sigh of relief, hugged me fiercely and we went into the house to wait for my father, who was working in a large optical company.

I had little contact with other children, and generally kept away from them, not because I was arrogant or afraid of people, but because I had no taste for their games. I still liked best to be with the son of a well-traveled doctor who lived in our neighborhood, with Kaspar Hedrich, who was the same age as me, and who, like me, was a quiet and lonely boy. I went on many hikes in the surroundings of the small town that was my home, and to him, as the only one, I sometimes told my dreams, but only when I was in my twelfth or thirteenth year, did the realization dawn on me of the nature of these ever-renewing and complementary dream images and what they were. From then on I kept them to myself and did not listen to Kaspar's vehement pleas to tell him more. In any case, he was the only one who listened with great attention and without any sign of disbelief until then to the tangled stories that often violently forced themselves out of me, perhaps only in the unconscious longing to find an explanation for them. When this finally came like a revelation, I guarded my secret in the realization that it could hardly ever be understood correctly by others.

Then something happened with Kaspar Hedrich and me, which at that time filled me with great uneasiness. Today, however, I must think of the event with a smile and am filled with consolation, of an event that was my first, dearest, greatest and most valuable confirmation of the special pardon that I have been granted.

Kaspar and I had a special joy of walking on cold winter days on the frozen dead branch of the river to a place where we could ice skate that was a half an hour's walk away. We kept this place of our solitary pleasures from our parents, knowing that they would not have allowed us because of the danger of both the remoteness of the water and the uncertainty of the ice conditions. They thought nothing other than that we, like the other boys, were on one of the two busy and completely safe, artificially created skating rinks of the town. The deception succeeded all the more, because neither of our fathers, who were busy during the day nor my mother, who was absorbed in the economic worries of the day (Kaspar's mother had been dead for a long time), had ever found time to teach us skating skills.

On the day I want to tell you about, Kaspar came to us with the skates on his arm to pick me up. There was a warm wind that had sprung up, and water dripped softly from the roof. All the more reason, thought my playmate, to hurry in order to take advantage of the last opportunity of the departing winter.

However, I had caught a cold the day before and was feverish. My worried mother, who came into the room during the visit, explained that in view of my condition Kaspar would have to do without my company this time. I was always obedient to my mother and complied. Kaspar was disappointed to have to do without his comrade, but then he said goodbye and went on his usual way to the lonely river place alone.

After about an hour, my mother took a pillow and lovingly made me sit on the bench by the warm stove and lean against the cushion. She herself did some work and advised me to take a little nap, and I soon heard her knitting softly rattling half in a dream. All of a sudden it was as if I could clearly hear the voice of my friend, who repeatedly and in the highest fear called my first name!

I wanted to rise, but I was paralyzed. I made a tremendous effort. Then it happened.

Suddenly I found myself outside my body. I clearly saw myself, sitting on the stove bench with stiff, wide-open eyes, with my unsuspecting mother at the table, lost in her counting meshes at the table. In the very next moment I found myself, as if carried away by a whizzing gust of wind, at the edge of that river arm. With the greatest sharpness I saw the leafless pollard willows, the uniform gray of the ice, the snow eaten away by the warm wind, the skate tracks on the slippery ice and in the middle of the cracked ice an open spot of the water, from which, screaming in fear, Kaspar's head protruded, and his wildly beating hands that searched in vain for a hold on the breaking ice sheets.

Without any reflection I stepped across the ice to the very edge of the collapse, reached out my hand to the man in the greatest need and pulled him without the slightest effort onto the solid ice. He saw me, chattering with his teeth from the frost, and yet laughing with joy, and opened his mouth to say something ---.

Then something pulled me away from him with terrible force and I was seized by an unparalleled feeling of fear, and I became painfully aware of my own distressed body ---

I suddenly saw differently, more unclearly, with physical eyes. My mother was standing in front of me, shaking my arm violently and shouting.

"For God's sake! Child, wake up! Wake up!"

I was sitting on the stove bench, so terribly frightened and breathless that my heart almost stopped. My mother told me then that she had seen me looking up at random with open, unmoving eyes. She had asked me what was wrong with me, and when I did not answer, she went to me worriedly. But despite the initial gentle touching and then more and more violent shaking, I sat there as if completely dead, without breath or any other sign of life, until I finally to her unspeakable joy came out of the deep faint and back to my senses.

After half an hour, however, our neighbor, the doctor, came to thank me for having saved Kaspar's life with so much courage and determination. Kaspar had come home wet and completely frozen to death and had told that he had fallen in on the arm of the river and had been close to death from exhaustion. In his fear he had without thinking that this must be in vain, called my name several times. There I was, who had probably returned to my usual favorite place, and suddenly stepped out of the bank of willows, went straight to him, and with a jerk of incomprehensible strength pulled him from the wet and cold grave and thus saved him. But when he wanted to thank me, I was suddenly no longer there and despite all calling and searching remained untraceable. And then Kaspar, completely frozen and stiff, ran home, where he, filled with hot tea, was lying under three feather bed covers and sweating.

It now came to a friendly meeting that ended with mutual astonishment on both sides, friendly contradiction between my mother and doctor Hedrich, with my mother pointing out that she had not left the room for a moment, whereas the doctor pointed out the specific manner in which Kaspar had recounted his experience. But when my mother, continuing her description, spoke of the inexplicable condition into which I had, however, fallen at the time when the accident happened, the doctor looked at me with a peculiar look and said:

"Well, well, were you in the end -? But no! Kaspar may have brought home a little fever, and there the boundaries between dream and experience disappear!"

With that, after a friendly goodbye, he went out of the parlor. But then he poked his head once more through the door, looked at me and said:

"Nevertheless, I thank you, Sennon, and ask you from the bottom of my heart to continue to watch over my Kaspar, for you seem to me a good watchman, a Bektschi, as the Turks say!"

This word, the meaning of which was not obvious to me at the time, nevertheless put me in the most violent excitement, and my mother, who must have probably attributed this to the rising fever, avoided telling my father, who was returning home, about the incident, probably mainly in order to spare me questions and thus to spare me new aggravations. It was only some time after this mysterious event that she told me that a certain apparition on my body at that time had filled her with indescribable horror. The narrow scar, which I had as a congenital birthmark between the eyebrows, just above the root of my nose, had been visible to her during the unconsciousness from which she awakened me by force, when a flickering blue light that looked like the sparks that Kaspar and I let jump out of a Leyden jar, and this glow went out instantly, when she shook me hard, but flickered up again more weakly after I awoke to life, and then gradually faded away. It seemed to her, she said to me, as if that with the extinguishing of this magical light my death had occurred, and the thought had shot through her that perhaps her frightened intervention had suddenly become fatal to me. Fortunately, I then returned to life.

Later, we avoided talking about the experience any further, and I believe that she never spoke of it to my father. But I was so preoccupied with the wonderful ability that had been revealed to me that it was many nights before I was free from the recurring dream. Today, on the other hand, I know, since I have become fully aware of everything, I know that during those nights, without full consciousness, but also not completely unconsciously, I left my body and undertook wanderings, the results of which are too unimportant to be worth mentioning here.

In any case, the discovery of this power, which I had at my disposal, brought my thoughts on other and bolder paths than before, and it was this that was of greatest use to me on the arduous path to true knowledge.

My and Kaspar's paths soon diverged to the extent that insofar as he continued to attend the Gymnasium, while I, at my father's request, went to the optic workshop. Because my parents were poor and reckoned that I, too, would gradually contribute to the household with love. I was in agreement with their plan and left secondary school without a moment's hesitation.

The fine, great skill and later not insignificant mathematical knowledge gave me great pleasure. Soon I had the opportunity during free hours to immerse myself in the wonderful world of the microscope, and under the guidance of my father, whose scientific education, despite his modesty, I began to make all kinds of preparations,

I learned how to color almost invisible cell nuclei and make them clearly visible, and studied the enigmatic behavior of the tiniest living creatures, with algae, mosses and molds, and daily discovered new, wonderful relationships, which perhaps would have escaped the attention of real scholars, as a result of their methodical, strictly goal-oriented way of working.

Thus I was happy in my work and in the security of my domestic life as only a human being could be. Really there were little annoyances with young people of my age who did not want to understand or even considered it disrespectful that I preferred to stay away from their pleasures and above all showed no desire for the company of girls, which almost completely dominated the lives of my comrades. However, I always succeeded in making them understand in a friendly manner that the work on my education was above all else and that the time would probably come later for me too when I could be accepted into their carefree circle with pleasure.

Gradually I got the reputation of being a strange and solitary person but I managed to get people to not care much about me and let me go my own way. My parents, especially my father, would certainly have preferred it if I had not separated myself too much from my comrades. But nevertheless they left me a free hand in such matters and surrounded me with unchanged and tender love. I suffered from the fact that I had to be different by nature from my companions of the same age. But it was precisely in those years that the insight into the wild adventures of my expired life, as Melchior Dronte became perfectly clear to me, and the terrible knowledge about things of eternity worked so powerfully on me that I urgently needed the solitude, in order to cope with the impressions that weighed heavy on me.

How I would have liked to have had some person with whom I could have talked about the survival of consciousness after the destruction of the body! It would have been a great relief for me to be understood in the crushing abundance of contrary views. But with whom would I have been able to share such unheard-of experiences, perhaps to be attributed to a

diseased imagination, between sleep and waking, death and life? Perhaps, my mother, insofar as the horror of hearing these things would have allowed her, with the unfathomable foreboding of women to have come closer to me emotionally. But words would have been in vain here, too. So I remained alone for myself and had to endure the dark agony, of experiencing once more the events of a past time, and go so deeply into the night, until everything appeared in the smallest details as the sharpest memory and gradually blended into the overall picture that gradually emerged.

How could I have liked the women and girls of the city whom I knew, since there was only one thing that disturbed the peace of my soul: the longing for that woman who was deceptively always disappearing in the double figure of Aglaja and Zephyrine, and also the only one that could bring fulfillment to my present life?

And the only punishment that could punish me for the transgressions of Melchior Dronte, or for my own transgressions, was the tormenting search, the burning desire for the face I loved above all else, the brief reunion and the recent slipping away of this being, to whom I was drawn with frantic longing.

On my eighteenth birthday this happened to me: I had, yielding to long insistence, arranged a Sunday excursion, with two friends, to which Kaspar also belonged, which made a small train journey necessary. We stood at the station in the early morning of that day, to await the preparations of the local train, consisting of smaller and older cars, when, with a thunderous pounding, a long-distance train passed through the station at a moderate speed.

I was standing at the very front of the ramp and could see the faces looking out of the broad window frames of the distinguished train. Most of them were strangers who had come from far away and were heading for the large port city on the still distant seacoast, in order to take ships to foreign parts of the world, especially to the United States.

Suddenly, it was as if a bright glow appeared and turned everything around me into an almost unbearable light. In a white dress, pale and beautiful, as I had seen her the previous night under the flickering of candles in the coffin, Aglaja stood in the window of a passing car. I recognized her immediately. Golden red curls blew in the wind around her forehead, her beautiful gray eyes were fixed on me with sweet terror, and the small hand that rested on the wooden bar of the lowered window,

suddenly loosened itself and pressed upon the heart beneath the young breast.

Oh, I saw that she was no different from me, that she deeply felt that we still had to pass by each other without being able to hold on to each other, that we were not yet permitted to unite into one blessed being, the divine consisting of the soul of man and woman. Certainly she only felt what I knew. But this feeling of the woman corresponded to the knowledge of the man and was as valuable and in this case certainly as painful. It was only a short, agonizing moment, when I was allowed to see with bodily eyes what once, measured against eternity, was no less fleeting and transient, and had been close. And it became clear to me that my way to perfection was still quite far and that many impure things would have to fall away before I could enter eternal peace as a perfected one. I was only a returned one.

It took a very long time until I recovered from the intense pain that hit me at the renewed new loss and to regain my equilibrium.

Soon after this incident, my father fell ill and died, occupied to his last breath with the care for my and my mother's further life. A few weeks later, my mother caught a severe cold, which turned into a severe pneumonia. I held her hand in mine until her last breath and had the consolation of hearing from her mouth shortly before her death, a saying that was well known to me:

"Thank God, we will meet again!"

Nevertheless, I cried bitter tears because she had left me.

I had long since been offered a well-paid position in the institution and my modest needs were amply provided for.

In my free time, after careful consideration, I wrote the long story of my life as Melchior Dronte and this brief description of the hitherto peaceful existence that I led under the name of Sennon Vorauf, and provided the whole with a preface. I now pack and seal the described sheets and will mark them with the name of Kaspar Hedrich who in the meantime has completed his studies and, like his late father, has become a doctor.

He lives in a nearby town, and when the right time has come, this completed manuscript will perhaps give him an explanation of my being, and it may be that it will put death in a different and less gloomy light for him and others than it may have appeared to them so far.

Some thoughts, which are difficult to put into words, of whose comforting truth I have convinced myself, cannot be shared with anyone. Everyone must find them in his own way, to the beginning of which I believe I have led everyone who seriously and devotedly strives to explore the truth.

It was about time that I did it. For great misfortune is in store for those who are now living ---.

To the Imperial and Royal Palace - Command Center
in
Tirana.

The charge of desertion is filed against the infantryman Sennon Vorauf, assigned to Searchlight Division No. 128/ B for unauthorized absence from his post.

Herr Wenzel Switschko, First Lieutenant.

Herrn Wolgeborn regimental physician Dr. Kaspar
Hedrich
Field post 1128

Dear Herr Regimental Doctor! I regret to inform you that a report has been made to the Royal Headquarters that our friend Sennon Vorauf has deserted. Dear Herr Regimental Doctor it is not true that he deserted, but it was like this. I and Vorauf and Corporal Maierl went for a walk in the Albanian town of Tiranna, and Vorauf had been acting very funny already the entire day and all of a sudden I was scared when he said:

“Thank God we will meet again.”

He was very kind to us and he gave his silver watch to Maierl and gave me a ring with a red stone.

“Keep this for a souvenir,” he said, and so I said,

“Sennon, what are you doing?”

Meanwhile we went to a Tekkeh of the Halveti dervishes, this one was a wooden house where there were coffins of holy Muhamedan Dervishes with green cloth on them by the door and Vorauf said: “I am called,” and went inside.

Then the corporal said, “Vorauf, how dare you! It is strictly forbidden for soldiers to enter the sacred places of the Muhamedans, but he went in, so we waited for him and after a while a dervish came out with a black turban and a small beard, a handsome man and he had a brown robe and a rosary with a yellow beads around his neck and this dervish gave us a friendly greeting, it was strange and we saluted him and again we waited for a long time, but no one came. So I went to the house where the dervishes live and in the meantime Herr Corporal Maierl stayed at the Tekkeh to watch, so one of the dervishes with a grey beard went along with me to the Tekkeh and searched for Sennon. Then he returned and said there was no one inside, so we looked at each other, went home and the corporal reported to the commander Herr Lieutenant Shwitschko and then he cried with me about Sennon and today it's been five days and there is no Sennon to be found, so only our Lord knows where he is, and the regimental doctor knows that he was a dear friend, and you might not know Maierl says he was a holy man, he did so much good for all of us and gave away his things. I wanted to report this, and if the Herr regimental doctor wanted to come it is a whole riddle with Sennon and I greet you obediently,

Herr Leopold Riemeis. Infantryman, searchlight
128/B.

It is around midnight.

Below my windows the country road runs out into the flat countryside, endless, gray. The wind rustles in the poplars. It picks at my windowpanes. Ghost fingers, huh? No, it's just the old leaves, which held out so splendidly in the freezing winter storms and which now the damp wind picks off, one by one. Down with them! Should one think it possible that I, Dr. Kaspar Hedrich, a man of exact science, the author of the book "The so-called occult phenomena. A Completion", yet here I sit, a beaten man.

Must I now recant, or what should I begin? Did I see as a boy of fourteen sharper and better than I do now?

I must go back. I have to get rid of the thick sheets of paper that my boyhood friend, Sennon Vorauf, left with his strange, squiggly handwriting, with a pale blue ink, as if the whole thing were a bundle of letters or diary pages from the eighteenth century. Did he do this on purpose? It does not

correspond at all with his straight and sincere nature. If ever a man was honest with himself and others, if anyone was passionate about the truth, it was Sennon Vorauf. For that I will put my hand in the fire.

After the horrible war, after all the misfortunes, the stupidity and hatred that have been brought to my country, I have returned home. And the first thing I find is this thick, now unsealed and read pack of closely written pages, which was left with me while I was with malaria patients in Alessio or Lesch, as the Shiptars call it, a poisonous and sad summer and was summoned to Tirana by a soldier's letter to look for Sennon.

But I have to go back; I have to look at things from the beginning. Maybe Sennon is looking over my shoulder or is looking, even invisibly, in at the window. Who can know?

We were together a lot in childhood. In his writings, he mentions the mysterious incident that took place on the river journey and in which he saved my life. Also my father, who had lived in the Orient for a long time, also believed it. He told me so himself. Only I, I told myself later that a rapid onset of a cold fever after I had rescued myself from the water-hole had fooled myself into believing that he had saved me.

And what happened later? I once went very early in the morning to pick up Sennon according to my habit. He was still in bed, his mother told me to go in and wake him up. I entered. Sennon was lying on his back in bed with his eyes open and staring. His chest did not rise and fall. I saw, already at that time with the observation of a doctor and practiced it unconsciously, that his breathing had stopped. I became restless and put my hand on my friend's chest. His heart stood still.

Fear gripped me. Was I supposed to go to Frau Vorauf in despair with the terrible news that her son, to whom she had been attached with an uncommonly tender love, was lying dead in bed? Thick tears dripped from my eyes, and I could not take my eyes off the calm and stylish face of my dearest playmate. Then it was as if I looked into the fine red mark that Sennon wore like an Indian caste badge between the curved brows, a luminous mist seemed to come out of the air and only became denser as it neared him. But this lasted only a very short time, and while I was still stunned with amazement at the bedside, life came back into the rapt look of my friend, his eyes moved, his usual sweet smile (never have I seen a person smile so enchantingly as him), played around his lips and as if awakened he said, "Is it you, Kaspar?"

In the manner of a boy, I immediately informed him of my just made perceptions and added that I had been on the point of either calling his mother in or to call him back to life by shaking him and pouring cold water on him. Then he looked at me seriously and asked me that if I should ever find him in such a state again, not to call him to life by force and to prevent the attempts of others in this regard.

"It is worse than what is called dying, when the thin cord between soul and body is torn. It is a pain which nothing can compare to," he said sternly, and nodded to himself.

I was used to incomprehensible speeches from him. He often muttered names to himself, the meaning of which was quite incomprehensible to me, named people with whom he could not possibly have come into contact with. But I was a boy, didn't think much about such things, and thought to myself:

"Today he's crazy again, that Sennon!"

This was all the easier for me because many of our classmates thought that Sennon, for all his affection, was a little disturbed. But nevertheless, they all liked him, and I know of no instance of anyone teasing him, arguing with him, or holding his peculiarities against him, as children are wont to do. Even the crudest of us knew that he deserved love and consideration, for he was the kindest and most helpful person even in his youth. Every occasion to do good to others was welcome to him. Even if it was only the small sorrow about a bad grade that he had received - Sennon would not rest until he had made the afflicted person cheerful again with his loving consolation. I myself was very attached to him, and when he rebuked me in his gentle way, it had more effect on me than if it had come from my own good father.

Yes, now in this spring midnight, when the wind passes over my roof and invisible feet seem to walk along the street, ever onward, toward an unreachable goal, everything that was lost in the whirlpool of the young years and in the lost, terrible, unfruitful time of this insane war sinks to the bottom of the soul. I remembered the summer day when, to my amazement, I saw the songbirds in the meadow on the head and shoulders of the resting Sennon and a little weasel was sniffing at his hands. A weasel! The shyest of all animals! And how everything disappeared when I stepped up to him. I also remember how Sennon helped a sick drunkard, the Pomeranian-Marie, who, seized by severe nausea, fell to the floor with a blue face. He picked

her up, and stroked her forehead softly with his hand, whereupon she smiled at him and continued on her way, completely recovered. Like I was there, when blood was spurting out of a sickle cut and it stopped when he stepped up to it, and how the flames on the roof of the carpenter's roof shrank, twitched and went out, as Sennon appeared and reached out his hand. I saw it with my own eyes. How could I have held all this in such low regard that I forgot it? How sorry, how unspeakably sorry I am for the years I spent so dully beside him. I would give all my exact science to do it over.

No, I cannot approach the matter with emotional regret.

I was foolish - like all young people. When I came home for vacations, I found that contact with the worker in Deier and Frisch's optical workshop was not appropriate. I preferred to go with Herr Baron Anclever from the District Headquarters and the dragoon lieutenant Herr Leritsch.

I cannot change it. It was like that.

But then I came to my senses. Herr Professor Schedler's lectures about psychic phenomena were the ones that pulled me out of the silly life I had fallen into. I began to look into the depths, into the twilight abyss, diving into which held a greater incentive than chasing after little dancers, drinking sparkling wine and conferring with morons about neck ties, pants cuts, and race reports. I threw them out of my inner life, as one removes useless junk from a room in which one wants to settle into. But I also forgot about Sennon.

Oh, what have I lost! I put my cheek on the last leaf of writing on which his hand rested in farewell. I call his name and look at the black window panes in the nonsensical hope that his dear, serious and yet so joyful face may appear behind the glass instead of the darkness outside. Everything that I now long for so unspeakably, was close to me, so close! I only had to reach out my hand, just to ask. Nobody gives me an answer now, and all my knowledge fails me. Or shall I console myself with the vague excuse that Sennon Vorauf had a so-called "split consciousness" and that the Ewli of Melchior Dronte could be nothing else than an allegorical revival of the sub consciousness, that became the second ego of Vorauf?

No, I can't reassure myself with the manual language of science. For I am mistaken about all of it ---

When I came to Albania, occupied by us, in the course of the war and went from Lesch to Tirana, in order to establish a home in that cool city, with its ice-cold, shooting mountain waters at the foot of the immense

mountain wall of the Berat, for my poor malaria convalescents, I saw Sennon Vorauf for the last time. It was exactly that day that a searchlight crew had just returned from Durazzo via the Shjak bazar. Among the crew members that were searching for their quarters I recognized Sennon.

I immediately approached him and spoke to him. His smile passed over me like sunshine from the land of youth. He was tanned and erect, but otherwise looked completely unchanged. I did not notice a single wrinkle in his masculine, even face. This smoothness seemed very strange and unusual to me. For in the faces of all the others who had to wage war in this horrible country, showed misery, hunger, struggles and horrors of all kinds, and everyone looked tired and aged.

We greeted each other warmly and talked of old days. But time was short. I had meetings and many worries about the barracks, for the construction of which everything that was necessary was missing. Our ships were torpedoed; nothing could be brought in by land. Everything had to be brought in from Lovcen, floated across Lake Scutari, and then from Scutari brought overland in indescribable ways. Every little thing. And boards were no small matter. I negotiated with people whose brains were made up of regulations and fee schedules. It was bleak; I felt like I was covered in paste and old pulp dust. All this disturbed me. I promised Sennon I would see him soon. He smiled and shook my hand. Oh, he knew so surely----!

In the afternoon a man from his department, Herr Leopold Riemeis, came to me and had himself examined. He had survived the Papatatschi fever but was still very weak. I involuntarily asked him about his comrade Herr Sennon Vorauf. His face was radiant. Yes, Herr Sennon Vorauf! He had saved his life. A colleague, I thought and smiled. He had naturally of course also, as I did at the time, taken a fever dream for truth. But I was curious, gave Riemeis a cigarette and let him tell the story.

Riemeis was a Styrian, a farmer's son. Sluggish in expression, but one understood him quite well. It had happened like this: In a small town, in Kakaritschi, he, Riemeis, had been struck down by fever. But it was already hellish. He was burned alive, his skin was full of ulcers, and on other days he would have liked to crawl into the campfire because of chills. And there was no medicine left. The senior physician they had with them shook his head. In eight days Riemeis was a skinned skeleton, and not even quinine was left, it had long since been eaten up.

"Go, people!" The senior physician addressed the platoon. "If any of you has quinine with you, he should give it to Riemeis, maybe the fever will go down, or we'll have to bury him in a few days."

They would have gladly given it away, but if there is none left, there is none left. My God, and there were already crosses on all the roads of the cursed land, under which our poor soldiers lay - in the foreign, poisoned earth.

"There you go, Riemeis -" said the doctor and patted him on the shoulder. "There's nothing that can be done." And left. Riemeis had a burning head that day, but he understood the doctor quite well, "There's just nothing that can be done."

Sennon was sitting next to Riemeis' bed. It was at night.

"Sennon, a water, I beg you!" moaned the sick man.

But Sennon gave no answer. He sat with his eyes wide open and did not hear. Riemeis looked at him fearfully. And then it happened. Something glittering fell from the forehead of Sennon and hit the clay floor. And then Sennon moved, looked around, smiled at his comrade, bent down and picked up a round bottle, in which were small, white tablets. Quinine tablets. A lot of them. From the depot in Cattaro.

Our peasants are strange. They didn't say anything to the doctor, but they put their heads together and whispered.

"My grandfather told -".

They did not question Sennon about it. They were shy. But they surrounded him with love and reverence, took everything from him, did all the work for him, and listened to his every word. And they understood well that it was precisely on his heart that all the suffering of the poor lay, who were driven into this killing, without even being considered worthy of questioning. This is not an accusation. Our country was in danger. Even those in power over there did not ask anyone. How else could they have waged war? How could they take revenge on us because we were more efficient and industrious? But why do I speak of these things! It will take a long time until mankind will be able to judge justly again. So Sennon Vorauf.

He bore the woe of the earth, all the misery of countless people, and his heart wept day and night. Even though he smiled. They understood well, his comrades, and it would not have been advisable for anyone to approach Vorauf. Not even a general. The people had gone wild through their terrible

handiwork. But there was no opportunity. Never has there been a more well-behaved, more dutiful man than Vorauf, but they all thought that shooting at people - no, no one could have made him do that. Riemeis said.

Oh, I had to go and mark out the ground for the barracks. I asked Riemeis to give Sennon my best regards. I would come tomorrow. Yes, tomorrow! Already that evening I had to leave for Elbassan.

Then came the letter from Riemeis to me and a copy of the desertion notice.

But fourteen days passed before I could leave for Tirana. A full fourteen days. I hoped that Vorauf would have been found after all.

First I visited the commander of Vorauf's department, who had filed the complaint, Herr Lieutenant Wenceslas Switschko. I found a fat, limited, complacent man with commissarial views, for whom the case was clear. Vorauf, a so-called "intelligent idiot", had deserted, and the Tekkeh he had disappeared into certainly had a second exit. One already knows the hoax. But, woe betide if he were brought in! Well, I gave up and went to the people. Riemeis received me with tears in his eyes. Corporal Maierl, too, a good-natured giant, a blacksmith by trade, had to swallow a few times before he could speak. They recounted essentially what was written in Riemeis's letter to me. We went to the Tekkeh of the Halveti dervishes. Slate-blue doves cooed in the ancient cypresses. A rustling stream of narrow water rushed past the wooden house and the snow covered crests of the Berat Mountains shone snow-white high above the pink blossoming almond trees and soft green cork oaks. In the open vestibule of the Tekkeh stood large coffins with gabled roofs, covered with emerald green cloths. On each of them lay the turban of the person who had been laid to rest.

I walked around the building. No, it had no second exit. Nowhere. I looked once more at the flat, red bricks of the entrance, hollowed out by feet, over which Sennon had stepped for the last time.

In the afternoon I took an interpreter with me, a young and clever Spaniard, and went to see the Sheikh of the Halveti, Achmed. I was immediately admitted and had a drink of coffee with him and a young serious-looking dervish, on a colorful tray in a bright room. The Spaniard told the Sheikh what I said to him.

No, the Sotnie (Herr) had come for nothing. It was well known that a soldier of Austria entered the Tekkeh and never came out again. However, this must be a mistake, because the Tekkeh has only one door.

Yes, fine. But how to explain the thing? Who was the dervish in the brown robe, with the turban of the Halveti and the amber necklace?

Oh, if only I had known the life of Melchior Dronte! If I had known about Isa Bektschi! But at that time the sheets with Vorauf's transcription were lying in my house thousands and thousands of miles away from Schipnie, on the country road with the poplar trees, sealed and wrapped, not even visible to the moon when it looked through the window of my room at night.

Yes, the dervish? It had been none of them. Moreover, the door of the Tekkeh was always locked- with three old locks, each of which weighed close to two pounds; very old locks from the days of the Sultans.

But some explanation - must there be some explanation? How did Vorauf and the monk get through the locked door?

The sheikh with the white beard and the young dervish looked at each other, glanced at me and the interpreter with a look of polite disdain; yes - I was used to such looks, since I had gotten to know Mohammedans, and then they spoke quickly and quietly with each other. I understood only the words "syrr" and "Dejishtirme!"

The old man bowed to me. He was very sorry that he was not able to help me. Unfortunately nothing more was known.

No, unfortunately, nothing is known, agreed the dervish. The interpreter translated. We were looked at amiably and inquiringly. The eyes said, "May we now ask to be alone again, my curious Herrn?"

I stood up. There was nothing more to be learned. I could see that. The dervishes were very polite. The sheikh touched the carpet with his hand before he brought it to his forehead and mouth.

"What were they talking about?"

I asked the Spaniard as we stood in the blinding sunlight under the cypress trees and listened to the laughter and gurgling of the wild pigeons above us. The interpreter shrugged sheepishly.

"They not talk like Shiptar, Albanian, Sotnie," he said. "They speak very softly. I did not understand. It was Osmanli, turc, *mon capitaine*, you understand - -."

"What do the words 'syrr' and 'Dejischtirme,' mean?" I asked.

I had remembered them well from memory.

The interpreter shook his head, then he said:

" 'Syrr!' It is secret, yes, and 'Dejischtirme', says in German: an exchange."

"Yes, and what does it mean?"

"*Le mystere* - the secret of the transformation--a transformation in a living body -. *vous comprenez?*"

"Fairy tale! Fairy tale!"

Yes, here time had stopped. In the coffeehouses, and when it got dark, the Turks only went out in twos and threes, so afraid were they of the jinns, the Afrits and the Gulen.

But I, Doctor Kaspar Hedrich - --

Transformation. So the good Sennon Vorauf. What had he said? What did it say in Riemei's letter?

"I am called!"

Then, in my distress, I went once again to the Headquarters.

"Cheeky swindle!" shouted Herr Lt. Switschko. "The fellow deserted. The Turks were in on it with him. I have seen it myself, how they bowed down to the ground before him, and the women came to him with sick children. I should not have tolerated the story from the beginning. Would you like to come with me to the Menashe, Herr Regimental Surgeon?"

No, I did not go. I also didn't want to see Riemeis and Corporal Maierl. I was very sad. Oh, these precious leaves in front of me! Why did these leaves have to fall into my hand so late? But he had wanted it that way, Sennon, the - yes, the Ewli.

I am sitting here all alone, and it is midnight. All that is long gone, life is short, and what I have missed will not return.

What wanderings are in store for me, what paths?

"*Syrr*," sighs the wind in the poplars. "*Syrr!*"

- Mystery!

End.

Afterword

What I am writing down here, hoping that it will fall into the right hands according to the will of God I, Sennon Vorauf, have experienced in that physical existence which preceded my present life. These memories have come to me by a special grace beyond that transformation which is called death.

The Rebirth of Melchior Dronte is a very interesting and spiritual story for me in many ways. I consider Paul Busson to be a spiritual master based upon his incredible insight into what it means to be human! In this story and in “Fire on the Glacier” which I have also translated I not only find hidden spiritual truths, but humility and a gentleness of spirit as well as that insight into the highs and lows of human life. There is no question that this story is intended as a guide or blueprint on the spiritual journey that all humans must take. He says as much himself:

I am fully aware that many people will read this book with incredulous smiles, and perhaps in some places at times with disgust and revulsion. But at the same time I hope that the number of people of deeper feeling will be large enough not to let this writing perish. To those who are able to remember details from previous forms of existence, who are conscious of a previous life, I would like to dedicate this book to them; I would like to make this book their own.

So in this afterword I take it upon myself to share that I am such a person. In my own way I have gone through the process of discovery and remembering that is described in this book and many of the episodes strike so close to home that they have shaken me deeply as I translated them. In so many ways this book describes me! I am one that has returned. I am an Ewli! In sharing some of my story it is my hope that others might find their own story as well and remember their own past lives.

I grew up in a strongly religious family and was thoroughly indoctrinated at an early age. But I loved books! Beginning at the 3rd and 4th grade I took out around thirteen library books every week and immersed

myself in the stories. This voracious reading continued all through my adult life in which I spent over \$500 each year on books and probably that much on music! As a child I remember reading books and not knowing the meanings of the words so I would look them up in the dictionary and not understand the words in the definition! Looking up the meanings of these words was a constant joy to me. I loved words and could make them dance and sing...

As a contrast I grew up on a farm and we were quite poor. I had plenty of chores to do, especially in the wintertime when we needed to keep the house warm by constantly going to the woods to bring back firewood. We had cattle, horses, dogs and cats. I loved animals and they loved me. My bond with animals has always been stronger than my bond with people.

Yet I had a secret life in that when I was around adults I was very well behaved but on my own I discovered shop lifting and hanging out with friends that were a bit on the shady side. I ignored this inner split until the stress became so great that I had my first spiritual crisis at the age of fourteen. I was taking confirmation classes after school in town and would steal money from the offering box, buy candy with it, and eat that candy during the confirmation class! I already knew all the bible stories by heart so it was pretty boring to me. But my conscience began to bother me and it reached a point where I hated myself so much that I realized it didn't matter if God would forgive me because I couldn't forgive myself! From that point on I turned to God and swore that I would never go against my conscience again, and to this day I have kept that promise. Perhaps you might see some similarities to the childhood described in the story.

At the age of nineteen and twenty there was a threefold crisis in my life that resulted in my having a nervous breakdown. There was an explosive collapse of my parents relationship that almost resulted in a divorce. I had my first serious love affair and experienced the painful result of unrequited love and heartbreak. But even more devastating was the destruction of my spiritual faith in which I was raised.

I was instinctively drawn to the Rosicrucian Order AMORC and its teachings and joined them at the age of eighteen. I received weekly instruction in monographs that continued for twenty-two years until I formally completed the degree studies. I might add that I am still an active member and elder in this spiritual school.

These early monographs exposed me to many concepts and spiritual practices that were totally new to me but seemed at the same time so familiar and true in my innermost being. One was the concept of reincarnation and past lives. I became fascinated with the subject and listened to many cassette tapes and read books by Dick Sutphen who was the expert and cutting edge authority in this new field. Authors like Jane Roberts and the Seth material explored concepts like walkins and parallel lives and how the past and future were both fluid. In short I extended way beyond my Rosicrucian studies.

But those Rosicrucian studies continued with self initiations and exercises. That was when I had a most profound spiritual experience during an early self initiation. A spiritual master appeared in the middle of my living room and sat cross-legged floating in the air. He remained there for over half an hour and I was able to walk around him and observe from all directions. He didn't say anything but radiated such a sense of peace and achievement that I was greatly encouraged in my studies. He appeared to me several times over the next few years and was extremely supportive in my spiritual quest.

Consider how the Ewli, Isa Bektschi, appeared several times in this story of Melchior Dronte and Sennon Vorauf. It was only many years later that I realized who this spiritual master was, Hanns Heinz Ewers, my former past life incarnation. I've never so publicly and openly stated this but it explains so many things in my life. Why I am so drawn to translating these German authors. Hanns Heinz Ewers was a Satanist, but also a Rosicrucian and Freemason, most likely of the Rite of Memphis and Mizraim which became merged into the OTO under Theodore Reuss . Many of those groups and orders were destroyed during World War I.

But the point is that Ewers was very educated in the spiritual traditions of his day and on his death bed his very last words were: "What an ass I've been!" With his dying breath and focus he turned his soul and awareness to the spiritual light and became the Rosicrucian Master that appeared in my living room just as Ewli appeared to Melchior Dronte!

The magician: "O Sheikh, I am going to the other world; procure for me a right in the hereafter!"

The Sheikh: "I can give you one piece of advice; If you follow it, it will be for your salvation."

Turkish legend

"When the angel of death touches your heart, the soul leaves its narrow house, faster than lightning. If it can take its memory along with it, it remains aware of its sins. This is the path to purity and that of the entrance to God."

Secret Doctrine of the Beklashi

I became fixated on Hanns Heinz Ewers and his writings, began translating him, reading his thoughts, studying his teachers like Stanislaw Przybyszewski and Max Stirner. And a lot of what I discovered disgusted me and made me sick but other parts were very bright and full of love and hope.

My personal spiritual journey has been very difficult but full of advances as well. So much of the story of Melchior Dronte resonates with my own journey and experiences that I felt I needed to share this afterword for those that might appreciate it.

In blessing,

Joe Bandel

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.