KARL HANS STROBL

The Crystall Ball

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Thegroup

Hassan was the last to enter the stable. All the others were already standing in front of the mangers and asking questions, you could hear the oats crunching between their teeth, every now and then one of them snorted as the chaff dust ran in small clouds around its nostrils (log.

Falada turned round and neighed softly. Her fresh, plump coat shone in the cold, even light that fell from the electric lamps on the ceiling.

Hassan was running late. He had stopped for a while between tunnels four and five, quite astonished by an unusual noise in the depths of the mine at midday. Normally, at this hour, all you could hear was perhaps the clattering of crockery where a miner was sitting on a coal shaft with his tin pan. Today many people were talking excitedly. Hassan's ears were full of a buzzing noise ... He had been standing still for a while.

His hooves clattered across the rocky ground, he took his place between Falada and the black Moor and began to eat. He was very hungry. He had pulled the cart up the slightly inclined slope as many times as she had to eat here.

had legs together. Falada was full and leant her head lightly against Hassan's neck. Hassan felt her warm breath. He stopped eating and turned round. A tuft of hair hung in her forehead, her big, moist eyes looked at him.

Hassan could feel how sad she was. She had not been there that long, he remembered very well how she had been brought into the stable, with the oak wreath around her neck, with flowers and ribbons in her mane, decorated as was customary in the pit· He, too, had been dressed like this, standing in the middle of the stable, pawing anxiously and snorting softly, just like Falada back then.

There was something around and around, something terrifyingly incomprehensible. Stone and stone, nothing but stone with streets and halls, but no sky above, only stone again and all filled with noise, with crashing, breaking and rumbling, as if everything had to fall together. There was no longer the great glow that burned warmly on the skin and in which the horseflies danced. Only a number of glowing orbs, from which a light fio8ed, which was at the bottom of the eyes.

There was a dark danger in all of this, something evil that they had fallen for. They wanted to hear his voice, they neighed, the others answered faintly from their cots. Why had they b e e n plunged from the bright day into this fear? It took a long time to finally understand what it was: the pit. Until you understood that you were there to work. Hassan had learnt to pull a cart across a sloping plain. He had learnt that there w e r e two types of stele, the good one, which was black

and shone in the light, and the other one was thrown away. Hassan stood in front of the cart until it was loaded with the good stone and then pulled it up the plain on a track. At the top, the good man unhitched it and tipped the cart over so that the black stone fell out. Then the empty wagon rolled back down the track on its own, and Hassan trotted along beside it alone. And then he was harnessed again by the bad man below.

Each had its own task.

When the big whistle blew, they all came together here in the stable and found the food in the manger. Falada rubbed her head against Hassan's shark. Hassan pushed back a step so that his head was next to Falada's. He felt his sadness merge with hers and they both felt better. Falada snorted against his ear. He felt that she had finally understood: this was the way it was and would never be any different. One was here and stayed here and did one's work until one was blinded by the dawning light and deafened by the screaming noise, like Roland, the old grey horse, who was now the oldest here in the stable. When you could take no more, you were given a wreath of "dry oak leaves around your neck and a small bell on a black ribbon and led away. Where9 nobody knew. But it must have been to the hard labour and ni1t-eating, to the crea8onal, the tearing that was in the guts. when you just thought about it.

Hassan and Falada stood motionless.

They stood for a long time; until something disturbed them. Something failed to materialise. And now

she did. The ringing of the bell did not come to call them to work. The roar that pierced the rock did not begin.

They waited a while longer. At last all the horses were seized with restlessness, some stepped from their places irresolutely, turned their necks and looked at the others. Roland, the grey horse, walked with his head down to the entrance, shook his ears, flapped his tail left and right and stepped unsteadily from one foot to the other.

If he didn't know what had to happen ...9 It was something quite extraordinary that was going on. The work stood still. A hum of human voices came closer. The horses crowded towards the stable entrance. Groups of labourers passed by, hoes over their shoulders, half-naked. They shouted in confusion. A dog boy put two fingers in his mouth and whistled so loudly that the horses retreated in fright. Only Roland, the half-deaf Mould, barely moving his head.

They heard the lift rumble. That usually only happened much later, when the other men arrived and the other horses, who were now resting, went to work.

The restlessness became fear. Everyone stood around Roland, huddled close together to feel united.

Then the good man arrived with three others. He made a serious face, but he patted Roland on the neck and said: "I want you to have some of this." Then he grabbed the grey horse by the harness and led him away. The other horses followed closely
by itself.

Falada whinnied softly: what was that?

They lamented to the lift. The good man pulled Roland onto the moving platform. The old animal began to tremble. Hassan understood that he meant he was now going where the others had gone - into the darkness. They saw the lift go up and disappear between the beams.

After a while he came back empty.

Now the black mofirl has been placed on the platform
and the lift went up.

Falada's nostrils quivered on Hassan's neck: what was that†

One of the horses mounted after the other. The man who always brought the food approached Hassan. The animal hesitated a little and looked round for Falada.

"Ciehl," the man said and gave Hassan a light
a blow to the back of the thigh.

Falada neighed and tossed her head.

Hassen was completely unconscious with fear. He felt how the moving floor lifted him, how he slid upwards. Something bright came towards him, hit his eyes and filled everything with light. The lift stood still. The man who always brought the food pulled Hassan away and handed him over to someone else. There was a large bare hall made of iron and glass and Hassan remembered that he had been here once before, decorated with an oak wreath and colourful ribbons.

Stunned, he followed the guide out of the hall.

He stepped into the light, the great glow was above his head and burning on his fur. And there stood something delicious: a tree and another, and after

The space through which you **had to** walk opened up on all sides. But there was also a whole lot of people there, ailes w8r black with people between the smoky halls and the chimney stones.

And on top of a pile of skulls stood one with a red tie and shouted: "We are going to do the great test of strength and are certain of our victory. We will rise from the depths of the earth and see who is stronger, us or capitalism. From today on: not a blow with the hoe, not a piece of coall We want to see what the coal barons say when everything has to stand still . . ."

Hassan didn't understand any of it. He only saw that the man had a red face and that many arms were flailing in the air. He pranced restlessly behind the leader, through a narrow alley in the crowd.

At this moment, the speaker noticed Hassan. Taken by an inspiration, he rose up on his toes: "Like this earth we are ... From the night of our delusion we are led into the daylight of realising that we must help ourselves. Just as this horse is unconscious of its powers, so we too were unconscious of our powers, but now, like this pit horse, freedom beckons us ..." A tremendous noise arose around Hassan.

He was startled, rose to his feet and almost pulled his guide to the ground. The man picked himself up, punched Hassan furiously and dragged him out of the crowd.

The uncanny, the roaring remained behind. Hassan

snorted and looked around: it was black and swaying back and forth. Then his guide pulled him onwards between piles of cinders and roughened plank walls and then suddenly there was something that made Hassan tremble - with happiness.

Behind the last piles of dormitories, towards the edge of a small wooded area, the meadow stretched gently upwards. The meadow, the be all and end all of joy, the m e a d o w , that was: trotting around, drawing in fresh air through wide nostrils, eating lush grass and, if you couldn't or didn't want to, lowering your head to the ground and soaking up the scent of the soil between wet stalks. And now Hassan suddenly realised that the meadow had never been completely gone, that he had carried it within him, a shining light in all the darkness.

A large part of this meadow was fenced in by boards as far as the forest. The man led Hassan through a door and then set him free.

Hassan stood indecisively, whinnying softly and scratching his hoof a little. He didn't understand what had happened, why he had been taken out of the pit. But he was flooded with a feeling of strength that spurred him on to commit some kind of happy folly. And before he knew what was happening, he had put his head between his legs and was firing out the back like the most ferocious animal. He neighed loudly, belligerently and defiantly. And he was answered from all sides, they were all there, his friends from the deep.

And just now the door opened and Fala-
there came.

She trotted up to him, stopped and looked at him with big eyes that were full of light. They stood like that for a while, not moving, just flapping their tails at the breeds that sat on their switches and enjoying the happiness of feeling their joy together.

And then they both suddenly began to eat, head to head, while the sun burned down on their skins and the flies swarmed around them. The cras had a delicious flavour and was so juicy that it smacked between their teeth. You could feel the power of the soil from which it had risen. It seemed as if the people had completely forgotten about the horses.

No one showed up to lead them into a stable. The night 1am and the horses were allowed to spend it under a sky full of stars, without being forced to lie down in the grass as they pleased. lay down.

At the same time, a feeling awoke in Hassan and Falada that they had in common but did not understand. They felt as if this camp under a starry sky had been there ages ago, as if the memory of it had only been buried and was now shimmering through the S1utt again. It had only been even further back then, endless grassland and an endless sky above.

Hassan stood up in the middle of the night and let out a whinny with such a tantalising sound that all the horses shuddered with happiness and iv\ut to something.

Morning came and a white mist began to smoke from the ground. The dark bodies of the horses were enveloped in it, as if the vapour was rising.

up from them. Every movement caused swirls in the milky white swathes. Falada took a few steps away from Hassan and imagined that she had lost him. Then she suddenly felt anxious and hurried to call him to her with a soft snort.

As the sun rose higher, the mists dissolved into light clouds, disappearing into the ground and the grasses were covered with rows of drops. The sun quickly dried the damp skins.

Those were days full of soluble wonders, a single uninterrupted feeling of happiness that was not even disturbed by the intrusions of the horseflies. Because the horseflies belonged to the meadow and to happiness like the sun and the sky.

You just weren't allowed to go near Roland. The grey horse was blind and almost deaf. He could see nothing of the blooming summer meadow, his ear was only able to hear the muffled sounds of the pit, but not the courageous whinnying of his companions. When you got close to them, you could feel a gust of sadness emanating from him, all happiness disappearing before him. You could sense that he was calm and contemplated what was to come. He was the wisest of them all, but you could see that wisdom did not bring happiness.

Hassan and Falada made friends.

A large, yellow dog came one day, stood in front of Hassan air: suddenly he put his head on his paws, barked and then made a funny jump to the side. He spoke a different language to the horses, but Hassan and Falada did1 understand him.

He wasn't as clean as she was and liked to sniff all sorts of disgusting things, but he was a good, honest bloke. They became good friends.

And once a man came up behind the dog with a little boy, as if led by him. The man lifted the boy onto Hassan's shiny back and Hassan felt two small fists in his mane. He took a few steps very carefully to throw off his fidgeting rider while the man walked at his side. Greif, the yellow dog, ran alongside, barking and laughing with his tail, proud to have brought the story together.

There was something in Hassan that made him very happy. He felt that this sky, this meadow, Greif, Falada, the man with the little boy, it was all just one thing, something very beautiful that should always stay that way. And he wished the little boy would come back more often and touch his mouth with his fists.

But the next day it rained. The horses crowded together under the few trees in the meadow, the water ran down their flanks and their hooves stood in little puddles. But even that was delicious. Suddenly they saw two people in mackintoshes coming across the meadow. The horses recognised them, although their faces were washed clean: it was the good man from the pit and the man who always brought the food.

The two men stopped not far from the horses and spoke to each other, pointing at the animals as if they were counting them, nodding their heads and walking away again. Hassan cringed, it

It was as if the wetness of the rain was penetrating through his skin deep into his body. It was as if he was seeing for the first time today that the chimneys and smoky machine shops were not so far from the meadow, and that the cable cars ran high up over piles of rubble. Like a wave, a dim foreboding ran through all the horses, and as they stood so closely packed around Roland, they suddenly felt the unmanageable, leathery sadness of the blind grey horse with terrible force.

That night, Hassan suddenly felt Falada, whose head was resting against his shark, thinking something quite unusual. lire soul began to speak. Hassan felt: Don't we want to leave here† I'm afraid. They will come and let us down into the pit again.

He answered in his thoughts: How do you want to away from hiert Where do you want to go†

Just jump over the plank and run away, no matter where. We are young and have nimble legs. Just hurry back into the pit. Look at Roland. That's what we're supposed to become. Hassan felt as if something was urging him with all its might to do what Falada wanted. It seized him, as in the first night: a dream of an endless sky and an endless grassland through which one could trot without ever seeing a human being. Wild cats lurked somewhere in the undergrowth, jumping on the backs of the unwary, biting and tearing them down. Sometimes you could see fire reddening the sky, then the grassland was on fire and people fled in wild haste. But all that was no more. Has- san shook his head: Oh, Falada, the well is full

of people. We have them all against us. How far did we get? How soon would we be caught?

Falada snorted softly and her soul went out in darkness.

The next morning was the last of freedom. Shortly after sunrise, a strange noise arose that the horses had never heard before. A whirring and whirring sound, as if of wheels revolving, bales of white-coloured smoke billowed out of the high chimneys into the clear morning air. They saw a man in a blue blouse standing on a high pile of cinders, waving his arms and shouting something at someone. And suddenly, one of the trolleys of the cable car, which until then had seemed to be fixed above the top of a spruce tree, started moving and glided across the apple-green sky.

A number of men came into the meadow; they threw halters on the horses and led them between the houses and chimneys towards the hall of iron and clas. As Hassan passed the last tree, he stretched out and picked up a ß\aul full of leaves, which he held between his teeth without chewing them.

They were brought onto the platform and lowered into the pit. Darkness and the roar of work came from all sides. Hassan couldn't find his way at first, he was so full of fear and sadness that he seemed to have forgotten his task. The good man had to lead him and guide him again.

When the chimes rang, Hassan left his

work and made his way to the stable. His first glance was for Falada. She was not there, a strange horse was standing in her place. Other horses were also missing, their places taken by strangers. Blind Roland had probably not even been brought down because his time was up anyway. But where was Falada?

Hassan stood in front of the cot without eating. His thoughts were running hot in his head. He knew that the pit went down to far greater depths, that there were several more floors of corridors and halls like this one. Which of them had Falada been sunk into? And slowly he realised that he would never see her again.

The times of work and rest alternated evenly. Hassan did his duty and let the change slip by. He knew that the sun would not see him again in any other way than with the scrawny wreath of egg and the bell on the black ribbon around his neck.

On his way from or to the stable, when he passed the mouth of the shaft through which one descended to the lower floors of the pit, he always stopped for a while. He would stick his head out, stare into the darkness in which he knew Falada, and quietly say.

His eyesight gradually became weaker and weaker, he began to feel his way. And his soul became dull. But at its bottom there was a faint shimmer of green and blue. It was a summer meadow under a blue sky, a yellow dog barked, and on Hassan's back sat a small

boy and held himself with tiny fists in his teeth. And then Hassan felt as if he could feel Falada's warm breath on his neck. He had to turn round. In front of his dull eyes it was like the grey veils of that misty morning in the meadow. But no Falada emerged from them.

The Mous

After three years, Andreas Holzinger once again climbed the old, dark, well-worn stairs of the old, dark, smoky Prague house. And smiling, he rang the bell at the door, under whose oval porcelain sign with the name Anna Steiner his business card had once been attached. Now there were two other cards; two people from the large stream of students had found temporary refuge on this island of comfort as Holzinger's successors.

Mrs Anna Steiner opened the door herself. She was still wearing her black gown, but it seemed a shade blacker and sadder to Andreas. She looked at Andreas wordlessly.

"It's not my ghost. It's me," said Andreas.

"I recognised you right away, Mr Andreas, but I'm so scared.

"I'm from Italy, from Greece ... I was outside for three years ... oh God, how nice it was, Mrs Steiner. You have no idea ... Now I'm learning something. Now I'm going home ... two days in Prague and I have to go and see my dear Mrs Steiner."

"God, how dear you are"

"I haven't forgotten you. It was very nice down there, but these people have no idea what cosiness is. And whenever it was really uncomfortable, I always thought of you gratefully." Andraas only now noticed that Mrs Steiner was wearing the hat with the long mourning veil and the black umbrella in her hand.

"You want to go outl If it's urgent, don't let me stop you ... I'll go with you. I just want to turn round once ... and let you see the mouse."

In the large grey eyes that looked at Andreas unblinkingly, an imme8able sorrow grew. "I'm on my way to the mouse," said the woman.

"You don't have the child in sight Yes - where did You then7"

"At the cemetery, Mr Andreas."

"NoII" The young painter took a step back. Grey ashes seemed to descend quickly and silently on everything, only the black of the mourning dress stood out rigidly and threateningly.

Yes, Mr Andreas ... half a year ago . Diphtheri(isl In three days it was over /hIt was seven years ... and it was a child so full of lust for life ... full of gratitude for the light, for every ray of sunshine ... I'll tell you - you knew the mouse …"

The whole house seemed to hold its breath, the never-ending din slipped into the distance.

"I want to go with you, Mrs Steiner," said Holzinger, "I'll take you to the mouse." -

They got out and entered the cemetery through the large gate. The woman knew her way only too well. She had probably travelled it countless times before, in her thoughts and in reality; it was as if Andreas was following a blood-red trail, the trail of bloody tears that she had cried along the way. They walked between the graves for a long time, right into the farthest reaches of the cemetery, where the unsightly mounds of poor people were. From the grey winter sky, individual flakes of snow were detached, çro8e stars that remained on the hard-frozen ground.

Mrs Steiner stood still and Andreas stepped up beside her. Under this little mound lay the mouse, the laughing, chatting mouse, with her seeing eyes and her brown mane curls. A small iron cross bore the label with her name. This child's grave was bare and sparse. The plant life that had been spun over it in the summer lay tangled and scraggy from the frost. There was only one very rare mound. In the centre of it stood a plaster statuette, a child wrapped in a peacock, hands outstretched as if to warm itself over the plaster flames of a small fire. Andreas immediately recognised the figurine. It had stood on top of the stove in his student room, an allegory of winter, the fourth piece in a series of seasons that sought to express the essence of the changing year in a traditional, easily understandable way. It probably belonged to a spring with cowslips and cowslips, a summer with sheaves and sickles, an autumn with grapes and wine. Nothing was

There was nothing left of these things but this peaceful child trying to warm its little hands over the fire. It was a bad factory product, made in dozens from a tasteless model, with a meaningless little face and a clumsy body.

Andreas Holzinger stood deeply moved. There was the same desire to overcome death through beauty that populated the Campo Santo of Italy with marvellous figures, which the traveller had to visit as a sight; the same longing for the consolations of art. Only inadequate and poor was its fulfilment, the meaning was hidden under ordinariness and tastelessness, so that one who did not have an artist's heart himself would hardly have recognised it. But Andrew grasped it, and he vowed to free it from the dross and give it back to the poor mother pure and infinitely more comforting.

The snow fell thicker and remained on the plaster child's head and shoulders. The woman sighed deeply and then stroked the little figure's forehead and shoulders with an infinitely gentle, motherly movement, wiping away the bells as if she were caressing a living thing. Then they turned to go, and in front of the cemetery gate the woman offered Andreas her hand in a wordless farewell. Andreas understood her and left her alone. -----

On the same day, he broke into the home of his friend, the sculptor Willert, who lived in a cheerful blue house next to the Bireska Gate. Willert set

He struck a fountain mermaid, which had been half pulled out of the stone, with mighty blows. A number of figures, some begun and some completed, stood around in the studio; in one corner something was crouching under wet cloths, like the veiled image of Sais.

"Bruderherzl," Willert shouted in the parodic, exuberant tone from the days of the Obermut, dropped his helmet and spread his arms. The old, laughing friendship was there, a friendship that needs a line of letters, that is satisfied with this: someone is there, somewhere in the world, on whom you can rely.

In the warm feeling of this friendship, Andreas set off for his destination after the first greetings and a brief report on the results of the last three years.

Did Willert remember that he had lived with a Mrs Steiner for the last two years in Prague?

0 yes: Mrs Steiner, the pattern, the ideal, who had discouraged him from strolling, motto: stay at home.

"/\tach Leîne Spä8e," said Andreas, "the poor woman's child has died. We called the girl the mouse, as a mouse wagged and slithered through the day. I 1 knew her from her third to her fifth year - I loved her very much ... Now she lies outside and on her grave is a vile plaster cast:
"Winter." You can't imagine. The poor woman wanted something beautiful for this grave and didn't have it. You could help. It doesn't matter to you. You have now had such great success with your Ariadne's fountain and have made money.

serves . . don't you have something for a poor child's grave9"

Willert had dismissed his mocking nature. He saw silently to himself and then shakes Andreas' hand: "You're a good bloke." Then he went round to the back and took the wet rags from the covered thing. The damp clay model of a relief presented itself. In a medallion entwined with rosebushes, a child played among lush vegetation of distinctly Willertian origin. An angel in heavy armour, hieratically rigid and with long, dragging wings, looked on from a distance. The whole invention expressed the sweetest, most comforting of Parede's thoughts.

"You're lucky," said Willert, "it forced me to do this thing, completely without purpose, into the blue, as if I had known that you would come ... Now it has its purpose. You don't need to worry about it any more. I have a fine blue granite. In two months, the plaster monster will be gone from outside."

But Willert was a philosophical sculptor, mere sight was never enough for him and there was always some deep thought in his carved stones. And he began to explain to Andreas with some pride that this relief meant nothing less than the reconciliation of the world in the hereafter.

You see, the division of the world into will and imagination has been cancelled. The child is the will, the plants are the imagination, they play with each other, that's why you also notice that the child quietly goes into dancing, while the plants quietly

Å hints of human formations. The angel, however, is the Eternal Christ, in whose care this transition takes place."

"Well, but keep that for yourself," said Andreas. Wiliest kept his word; after two months Andreas received one of his friend's rare clumsy, verbose letters informing him that the relief had been set up and looked as if it had been in his home. And then there was also a letter from Mrs Steiner, full of timid thanks, whose hesitant stammering Andreas attributed to her deepest sorrow. He almost felt as if he had to deny himself his clumsy Shame nobleness.

A year later, Andreas Holzínger's journey took him through Prague again. He had asked Mrs Steiner to wait for him at the Bafinhof, as his stay was only to last a few hours this time. She still carried her deep sorrow, which had lightened around Leinen Zug.

"Let's visit the mouse," he suggested. She was startled, as if she felt a renewal of pain, and Andreas was about to abandon his proposal when Mrs Steiner raised her lowered arms and said with clear eyes: "Good - go

It was a bitterly cold winter's day, life seemed to be running through the streets more hastily than usual in order to warm up a little. The frost had frozen hard, icy crusts of snow were spread over the ground and the grass. The woman dressed in black walked ever more slowly, as if she were hesitating.

before the finish line ... but then they stood in front of the 1One Grave.

It was exactly the same as a year ago. The simple cross and the plaster statuette of "Winter" - no trace of Wiilert's princely artistic gift.

Astonished, Andreas looked round at the woman: "I thought that . "

Her look was full of pleading humility: "Yes - I have "Let me take the stone away again ... Forgive me, you meant so well."

"Didn't you like it?"

"Oh - it was beautiful," she says honestly and without hesitation.

Andreas pondered. Had Willert told her about the reconciliation of the division of the world into will and imagination?

"Willert told you what he had in mind."

But then he realised that Willert had remained silent and no longer needed the woman's astonished "no". But the urge to get to the bottom of things, to unravel the mysterious feelings of this woman, was overpowering in him, and it forced him to ask a harsh question: "Why do you like this plaster cast better? Why do you put it on the grave9"

Mrs Anna looked at him: "My mouse is running in the Lalten Erde." -

Andreas Holzinger was ashamed, ashamed that he had not understood the woman. And felt the powerlessness of all the consolations of art before the deep wisdom of this simple motherly feeling. She had felt the strangeness in the stone, the coldness

The thought that burdened the work and resisted her inner understanding. What was the reconciliation of the division of the world to her? But the mouse froze in the cold earth. That was the bitter mother's feeling, the next thing, the fatal thing. With it she had revived the bad plaster statue of winter, this figure of the freezing child who wants to warm its little hands over the fire.

He stood with his hands hanging down and his eyes lowered. He felt as if a sad light was emanating from this grave, illuminating many things that had remained alien to him in his art and its effects: the indifference of all form to feeling.

And he now also understood why she had had not found ...

The stark e Mann

When Peter Wessel became a councillor in his hometown of Drontheim in Horwegen, he set his sights on his next goal, which was to become mayor. For this, however, it was necessary to bring his name even more into people's mouths and also to become a little more prosperous, so that one could then live all the more hospitably.

In those days, however, prosperity and glory were nowhere more difficult to achieve than on the sea. For the Spanish war of succession had thrown the states of Europe into such disarray that mine and thine had become an empty sound on the sea and that a capable and determined man could achieve greater empire in a single long voyage than in ten labour-intensive years on land.

So Peter Wessel recruited two dozen good lads, equipped his ship, the "Anna Katharina", with weapons and provisions and bid farewell to his wife and children.

"And bring me a Frenchman as well," said the stately Anna Katharina, after whom Wessels SchIP had gone, "I'd like to have a look at such a fidgety little man."

Peter Wessel promised and set sail. On the

He took the first French merchantman away from Ostend. But it was a poor catch, the ship was an old, worm-eaten box and the cargo consisted only of skins, so the captain only took part of it away. Less for the sake of profit than to avoid being laughed at for having to leave empty-handed. Then he released the skiff again and continued his journey.

Off Dieppe, however, a French corvette spotted him and immediately gave chase.

Captain," said his first mate after they had sailed before the wind for a while, "I think this thing is coming to a bad end. They have more canvas than we do. I shouldn't be surprised if they catch us. As I was going on board, I came across a black cat."

"Go into the cabin and have an aquavit," said Peter Wessel and took the wheel himself. But it didn't help that the captain was steering himself, Johannsen was proved right. After a while, the corvette released a shoe8, and the bram rod crashed onto the deck. Peter Wessel also fired a shot at the faind from one of his three guns. The battleship responded with three guns, causing the foremast to fall and Abel Garborg from Gudvangen to take the cap off the mast.
head was torn off.

Peter Wessol was not only a bold but also a clever man and raised the white flag. The corvette approached and lay alongside the
"Anna Katharina", from eight pipes, at the end of which the gunners stood with burning fuses,

Monsieur Annibal d'Estafette rowed over and informed Peter Wessel on behalf of the king that he was a prisoner and that he and his ship would be judged by the prize court.

Peter Wessel ended up in a thick, round tower by the sea, the upper floor of which he occupied while his people were accommodated on the ground floor. He was not at all surprised or angry about his fate, because as a clever merchant he had taken this outcome into account from the outset. The only thing to do now was to become free again; the loss would have to be recovered later.

In order not to be in an unseemly hurry, he first let two weeks pass. Then he asked his guard to obtain permission for him to write to his wife so that in the meantime she could start collecting the ransom that would be imposed on him by the prize court.

Nicolas, the tower keeper, had been married since Lurz's time and was very happy with his young wife, so the idea of a grieving wife had a powerful effect on his staid mind.

"You'll see her again* he said comfortingly,
"Don't worry about it. If you have a wife and friends, you will soon be free." Then he remembered that he'd been wondering about a blessed secret for days, and he asked with sympathy: "Do you also have children'7"

"Oh jal Twelve sons and six daughters."

At first Nicolas looked at him, completely frozen, then he slapped his thighs with both hands and danced around the parlour, roaring with laughter.

"You're a fun bird," he finally said, gasping, his voice half choked, "you're the funniest prisoner I've ever seen."

"I don't know what's so ridiculous about that," Peter Wessel replied seriously. "Children are a lot of trouble and worry."

"And as many as eighteen ... You can populate a whole village with that ... how many sons are there?"

"Twelve sons and six daughters," replied the Horweger, "and four have died."

"Listen, captain," said the jailer, shaking his head, "are you a fool yourself, or are you trying to make a fool of me† That's not possible, nature doesn't allow it. In the whole of Brittany - heck, in the whole of France - there's no one who has eighteen children. If someone has four, the whole region is amazed."

"You don't have to believe me if you don't like it," said Peter Wessel angrily and turned away.

Mr Nicolas left. But in the evening, at a time when the watchman was not usually in, there was an unusually long and laboured rattling at the door, as if someone was trying to open the lock who was not quite familiar with this work. At last the door opened and a young woman Lam entered. The Norwegian had already seen her a few times down in the courtyard. It was the watchman's wife: she was very red in the face and stood embarrassed at the door.

Peter Wessel looked at her kindly and waited-

wondering what she would want from him. A red evening cloud cast its glow into the parlour, so that the blush on the pretty young woman's face seemed to rise even higher. "Excuse me," she said at last, "is it true that you have twelve sons and six daughters? said . . ."

"He told you the truth, madame," Wessel replied as kindly as the young woman's confusion and lovely face seemed to serve, "there are aditzehn in all - and four have died on us."

"Oh God, oh God," she stammered, "how is this possible...?" Peter Wessel smiled.

"Sir, you want to bIo8 us here for the best. holdl"

It was impossible to become indignant in the face of so much amiable consternation. The captain kept his friendly countenance: "You may believe me; I swear to you that it is the truth." Madame Nicolas withdrew quickly, as if from the cage of a starLng animal, over whose cage The fact that you are not entirely in the clear.

From that day on, Peter Wessel began to play the role of a kind of sight-seer. At first, the families of Nicolas, the fitter, and his young wife came to look at the strong man. The girls laughed, nudged each other and whispered, the older women looked at him curiously, the men straightened up and pulled back their shoulders to appear as tall and broad-shouldered as he was. But the eighty-year-old great-grandfather Anselme was wide-eyed. He hissed venomously: "No. No;

No ... let him believe that, whoever wants to ... He won't make a fool of me."

"But Grandad," said Marion indignantly, "if he has sworn ... he will not bring such a sin upon himself." And they were all over old Anselme because he wanted to give the miracle man the honour he deserved. Later, the more distant bases and cousins and finally strangers from town and country came. People travelled from far and wide to the tower where the famous Norwegian was sitting, they were willing to pay for it, they were not afraid of bad weather or the inconvenience of the journey, and gradually the custom of leaving a gift for the prisoner became established: Cash, delicacies and, above all, money, which, after all, offered all sorts of life-connections.

This includes changes.

The guard Nicolas did not fare badly. For him, too, there were many a good bite and many a piece of money. With the authorisation of Colonel Deschamp, who, as commander of the tower, could not help but pay a visit to his prisoner and show him his respect, he began to pay the taxes. He began to collect a certain entrance fee from the strangers, which he set aside for Mr Nicolas.

Peter Wessel calmly put up with the influx. He was a philosopher enough to realise that his resistance had done him little good and that little of his inner dignity was lost when he was forced by circumstances to endure the naysaying of the Brethren. He remained polite and

He was quiet and, without engaging in rambling conversations, willingly gave everyone information about his life and his family. He also gave his crew a share of his earnings in the ground floor of the tower, so that they could sometimes treat themselves to a glass of wine. When a Norwegian sea shanty was bellowed out into the courtyard, Peter Wessel paced back and forth in his room, his arms folded behind his back and a steep crease between his eyebrows.

One day, the guard Nicolas Lam was very eager and almost dismayed to see his prisoner and called out to him: "Get ready quickly, Captain ... a carriage is downstairs. You are to be presented to the Lord Count d'Urville. You have been sent for. The colonel has authorised you to leave the tower." Since Peter Wessel had become a wealthy man and a source of income for Nicolas, the guard had abandoned the disrespectful manner he usually used towards his charges. The Norwegian dressed quietly and followed the guard into the courtyard. There stood Count d'Urville's glass coach, and surrounded by four armed horsemen, Peter Wessel was brought into the castle in it. The count was the most influential man in all of Brittany. But if he had not yet asked to see the famous Norwegian, it was only because he had only recently returned from Paris had come to his castle.

After an hour, Peter Wessel stood in the castle's Chinese room. The walls were lined with porcelain tiles, man-sized vases

The corners and nooks and crannies were covered. The count and countess watched the prisoner with interest. Audi the Obest Deschamp was there.

"So this is what the men look like who can say they have twelve sons and six daughters," said the countess with a smile.

Peter Wessel stood quietly in the centre of the room. His sword almost brushed against the chandelier, which hung from the ceiling with many softly tinkling porcelain bells. It looked as if he could sweep away all the delicacy and fragility of this room, including the Count, the Countess and Colonel Deschamp, with a single movement of his arm.

"Yes, yes," said the count, "only the north produces people like that." The countess gave him a look that said it would be better for him not to stay too much in the foreground right now. With his finely curled wig and the slender wrists protruding from the delicate tips of his arms, the count himself looked like the product of a Chinese porcelain factory.

The colonel caught the countess's eye. His expression asked whether he had promised too much and whether they were satisfied with him.

"Stand up, Colonel," said the countess, "and stand next to your prisoner."

Deschamp obeyed. He was more than a whole head shorter. "Oh," laughed the countess, "I didn't realise you were so small. Mr Peter Wessel has every right to want to make us believe that it is possible to have so many children."

"It seems that Your Honour doesn't believe me," says Peter Wessel.

"You can beguile the gullible country folk, my dear captain, not me. At least I am pleased that appearances permit such deception. So much power is always a pleasing sight."

The Norwegian thought a little: "I can convince Your Honour of the truth of my words," he then said.

"You make me even more curious. If you succeed, Idi will see to it that a ransom is raised for you." The countess's eyes looked up like distant beacons. Her eyes fell scornfully on the count's face, then on the colonel's. Her lips played with a smile that was released in a hurry. Then she opened her eyes at Peter Wessel, like Chloe in a shepherd's play - "And how do you intend to prove that to me? Kapitgnt" she asked.

"It's very simple, Your Grace," said Peter Wessel, "there is a picture in which we are all depicted together. Me and Anna Katharina and all the people. Allow me to write a letter to Drontheim to ask my wife to send the picture..."

"That would, of course, be a powerful proof," the colonel hastened to say, "I take the liberty of saying that I think it would be appropriate to allow him to do so."

The countess had placed her feet on the tray in front of her chair and was now sitting there with her knees drawn up, her upper body leaning far back and looking at Father Wessel. It was a silent laughter.

ter in that look. The corners of his mouth pulled down and his fine nose turned white.

"Yes, gewiB," she finally said, "so write to your wife, my dear Peter Wessel."

"I will send the letter to Your Honour's secretary so that there is no suspicion that I might have an appointment with my wife."

The countess agreed, Iie8 called the secretary and Peter Wessel dictated a letter to him in which he briefly asked for that family picture so that he could enjoy the sight of their lives in his captivity. He then added that Anna Katharlna should make no further effort to raise the ransom; there was every chance that the ransom would be paid for him here.

After he had finished this sentence, he looked questioningly at the countess.

"I promised," she said.

A favourable opportunity arose to transport the letter. It could be given to a Norwegian merchantman sailing under the French flag. Peter Wessel was back in his tower and received the visits of the curious. His fame radiated throughout Brittany. From week to week, rumour increased the number of his children. Pierre Remoulade, the city poet of Brest, wrote an ode in which he **compared** Peter Wessel to Prîamus. The example of the Countess d'Urville drew the sympathy of the entire aristocracy.

Six weeks later, the Norwegian salesman brought the picture and a letter from Anna Katharina.

Peter Wessel immediately sent a message to the castle and was summoned for an audience on the following day.

He was expected back in the Chinese room. He approached the countess with bold steps, the porcelain bells of the chandelier dangling and tinkling, and presented her with the picture with a bow.

It was the work of a master craftsman and was remarkable for nothing more than the art of squeezing such a large number of people into a space no larger than the surface of a hand mirror. Peter Wessel and Anna Katharina sat in the centre and the whole crowd of children lined up around them.

The countess looked at the picture. Then she burst out laughing: "My God, so it's true. And all of them - all of them look as much like the good captain as a father could wish."

Peter Wessel stood there proud and beaming: "And I would just like to mention that8 this picture is not complete. My youngest son is missing. My wife told me that he arrived five weeks ago."

Then the countess had a fit of laughter that threatened to choke her. "You've really earned your ransom," she said, then. "It has been collected and is ready for you. I have made it a point to return you to Anna Katharina's arms soon. But just tell me, my dear captain, there are so many women in the world …"

"I have never loved another woman," said Peter Wessel seriously.

Then the countess turned her head towards her husband and looked him sharply in the eye. The count cleared his throat and drew the delicate tips of his arms down over his delicate wrists. Babette, the pretty maid, who had just entered the room with a tray full of wine glasses, hurried out.

"Please knock, gentlemen," said the countess, "To the welfare of our prisoner, who today becomes a free man." -

When Peter Wessel had departed after having paid his debt of gratitude, the countess leaned back in her chair and pondered with a smile. Countess leant back in her chair, smiling to herself, while the Colonel discussed the event in dainty sentences modelled on Pierre Remoulade's style.

"My dear colonel," the countess interrupted him after a while, "do you know why the giants told of in the legends were destroyed by man9"

"No," said Colonel Deschamp, puzzled.

"Well they were just as stupid as star1 and big." -

Peter Wessel came to Drontheim in September back.

"So you're bringing me a Frenchman?" asked Anna Katharina.

"No ... You always have to be afraid of breaking it. These French people - they're a strange lot. They're surprised when you have children." That was in September.

In May, Mrs Anna Katharina gave her Catten his fourteenth son. t

A judgement of God

Of all the days of the week, little Toni loved Saturday the least. That was the day at the end of which his father came home from the factory where he worked all week and which was so far away from the city that he could only come home on Sunday. Not that Toni didn't like his father. But his father smelled so bad, was so dirty and sweaty, and when you looked at his hands, you immediately thought of the enormous whirring machines that Toni had been so afraid of since he had once been in a spinning mill with his mother.

But that wouldn't have been the worst thing. Because when his father had been home for a while and had washed and changed his clothes, the foul odour disappeared and his hands became completely different and no longer reminded him of the machines that in Toni's foreboding dreams were the cruel forces of evil to which he felt his life had been delivered.

But something else remained. And that was the ûble

The mood the father fell into when he was at home for a while. As the mother was looking forward to the Saturday

Toni knew that he was looking forward to the evening that was to bring his father. And the father entered quite cheerfully and with a song on his lips. As soon as the two people were together, however, a rubbing began, as of wood against wood, it 1am turned into throwing, then into an exchange of words and finally into loud shouting.

The only thing Toni remembered about these arguments was that his mother demanded that his father marry her and that his father refused to do so. One word remained in his memory that his father had once spoken and which Toni was unable to clarify for a long time. It was: "Nothing for nothing gives nothing again". Although Toni wasn't sure what it meant, the mere sound of the word seemed to him to be the bleakest thing he had ever heard. From these quarrels between his father and mother, Toni formed a peculiar idea of marriage. To him, it was like a gate through which one only had to pass to be immediately in another world that was much brighter and friendlier. His father had the key to this gate, but he refused to give it up.

Sometimes the father would run away when a soldier's quarrel had broken out and not come home until Sunday morning. Then he went to bed and slept until high noon. His mother would walk around quietly and cry to herself. For Toni, there was a grey coat over everything, like the one he had once seen on all the furniture in the living room of the widowed Mrs Majorin on the first floor. For he loved his /¥\utter and stood by her in his heart, assuming in his childish mind that all things were grey.

Mothers would have a right to enter through that gate.

And he had to agree with his neighbour, who was his refuge in winter or on rainy days. His mother *went* to the houses to wash for the people and Toni was often alone. In the summer he ran around in the alley, but in the rough season or in bad weather he fled to the neighbour, who sat him in her kitchen, where it was dark but at least warm. Well, and this neighbour used to say: "Your father is a bad man, Toni, he's doing his duty against your mother." Toni learnt the word guiltiness from the Lord's Prayer, which talks about guiltiness, so he knew that it was something serious and strict that no one should avoid.

For Toni, however, the significance of marriage only emerged from the realm of the image into the inexorability of reality when he started school. Toni was suddenly faced with the discovery that all the other children had the same name as their father, while he was called by his mother's name. In response to a boy's cheeky question, the teacher grimaced and then explained to Lurz that this was because Toni's father had not married his mother. Toni now bore the complicity of the others like a burden and had to endure their laughter and ridicule.

One Saturday, em Seilténzer came into town. The green caravan was pulled over the bumpy pavement of the main square by two beleaguered, one-headed nId'enden horses and was parked right in front of the old fountain basin with the wildly moving Neptune

stop. Toni saw the lift from the window of his parents' room, which was under the dadi of a three-storey house. He ran downstairs to see the unknown, this piece of stranger that had arrived nearby.

But by the time he had pushed his way to the cart, a policeman was already standing there and shouting at the people. It would not be allowed to stop here in the middle of the main square and they should leave with their rubbish outside the town. Then one of the two ly\men got back on the coachman's seat, gave the nags the whip, and the carriage rumbled on along the pavement towards Wiener Gasse. Toni followed behind with a whole crowd of curious people.

But his father caught him on the corner of Wiener Gasse. He seemed to be in a bad mood, clasped the boy's small hand in his big fist and pulled him away without a word. Toni looked down fearfully at this unmerciful hand, whose back was covered with rough bristles, he felt the sweaty inner lips and thought bitterly of the bickering he would now have to listen to again.

It really didn't take long for the argument to start. One of the workers from the factory had left for America a year ago and a letter from him had been read out today in which the emigrant described how well he had done and that he was now earning ten times what he had earned at home. His father saw a long road ahead of him, which he knew would one day lead to a large hall, and he couldn't walk it because he felt like he was going to have to go back home.

held back. He was bound and paralysed. But her mother had been to confession today and had brought back from the confessional grave misgivings and anguish of conscience. Her whole life was branded with the stigma of sin and shame. The priest had threatened to refuse to absolve her the next time if her case was not in order by then. And now she was particularly angry with the father at a moment when he would have been sensitive to the slightest reminder of his attachment.

Toni saw the dark exit approaching like a black cloud. He could feel the words becoming ever more harsh and slurred. He knew these narrowed eyebrows, this averting of the eyes, this swelling of the veins in his forehead from his father's bad behaviour. A tremor ran through his body. He was unable to bear it, he had to leave.

Lelse, unnoticed by the quarrellers, slipped out of the túre. Down in the main square, he stood still and looked up at the green sky. The words he had heard lingered in his mind. There was one thing that was particularly bright and starry: America! Toni's eyes were fixed on the green evening sky. He had an image of endless forests, of immense plains with a jagged wall of black factories at the edge. For the first time, he was not completely and without objection on his mother's side. There was something in him that brought him closer to his father, a shy meeting, a finding in a shared longing.

Old Lebwohl came by, the note on his liver,

with a pack of posters under his arm and a pot of paste and a paintbrush. At the next street corner, he chose a favourable spot with an expert eye, then carefully pasted a red note on the wall. Toni stood behind him and spelt it out. So the tightrope walker had obtained permission to perform after all. It said that Richard Richardson, known as the Flying Man, would be walking the tightrope across the main square tomorrow on Sunday at 1 o'clock in the morning. And underneath it said: "Blondin II. The walk through the air. Challenge. I will take the liberty of carrying anyone who reports over the rope on my back. Everyone is politely invited. Completely free of danger. Reward five guilders."

Toni suddenly had the desire to see the tightrope walkers today, the green wagon that travelled through the world, this piece of foreignness that had suddenly come into the old town. He walked down Wiener Gasse, across the bridge and back up the hill to the "Zur Sonne" inn, where the tightrope walkers' green wagon was parked on the lawn.

The troop consisted of two men, two women and a group of children of different ages. They had built a fire under a large field kettle, the flames licked boisterously up the heated kettle walls; every now and then one of the two women would lift the lid, add a handful of ingredients to the boiling pot or stir it with a large cooking spoon. The men took care of the horses and the children played between the wheels of the wagon like young dogs. It was all done so unselfconsciously, as if these people

were alone somewhere on a barren heath and not in the midst of a circle of people whose wonder and curiosity clung to them. One could see that they were accustomed to the expressions of bourgeois astonishment, this superiority of the country people, which concealed a little agonising envy. They remained calm, untouched by the mocking glances and half-loud remarks, equally blunt in the face of pity and spite.

Toni Melicher thought it must be very nice to travel around the world in a green wagon, often as far as America, every evening in a different town; then to camp, light a fire under the kettle and get used to having people gawp at you.

Two boys standing not far from Toni bumped into each other.

"You, Toni's here," said the taller one, "come over, we'll throw him in the ditch ..."

"He can look forward to Monday when he gets to school," the other replied, "I'm curious to see what kind of punishment he'll get."

"So come on," urged the taller one, "what's in it for us, maybe he'll talk his way out of it ... It's better if we beat him ourselves."

But when the two boys had wound their way between the adults' legs to Toni's place, he was gone. He had noticed his enemies and was now in the elderberry bush over on the slope. He was not afraid of them and would have dared to take them on, but it was foreseeable that one of the adults would interfere in the brawl and put Toni in the wrong.

would. It went without saying that he was always proved wrong. First, after school, ifin had mocked the two of them and then attacked them physically. But when he had defended himself, the teacher had come and promised him a punishment for Monday.

From his place in the elder bushes, Toni could see the whole camp of the tightrope walkers. He felt the fire burning like tiny glowing spots in the background of his eyes. The sight of his enemies had reminded him of the punishment he was facing at school. He could no longer imagine that away. It burned somewhere in his body like the fire in his now sensitive eyes.

Toni sat in the elderberry bush for a long time, until all the curious people down below had got lost and the tightrope walkers were getting ready to go to their camp. Then he came out and went straight for one of the two men. "What do you want, kid?" asked the surprised man when Toni stopped in front of lim.

Toni had long since prepared his words and thought he had them ready on the tip of his tongue; but now he still couldn't get anything out. At last he said:

"Can you use me nilt"

"Come here, Wenzel," the man called to his comrade, "there's someone who wants to join our troop. I think it's an amazing number, isn't it?"

The second tightrope walker was a long, skinny man with a yellow face. He had caught malaria in the coastal country and couldn't quite get rid of it. He came here, stood in front of Tom

au(and looked at him closely. Then he burst out laughing. "What can you do?" he asked.

"I can only stand on my head and walk on my hands. But I can learn anything." Toni had a vague idea that such gangs of rope dancers were recruiting young boys and training them to become performers. He was prepared to have all his limbs twisted and go on a starvation diet to achieve his goal.

The whole troop had become aware and approached. The children stood around the strange boy and laughed in his face.

The long tightrope walker had strange, dull, shiny feverish eyes that fixed a fixed gaze on the boy. Toni felt as if death was looking at him. And now the man was grinning again. "No, my dear," he said, "what do you think sot That only happens in robbery stories. The police would be after us. And then ... just look at the gang. Nine of them. All our own. If they break their bones, it's nobody's business. What are we going to do with you9 We don't need you."

Toni /Y\eIicher walked away very sad. He had really pinned all his hopes on this one possibility. A light that suddenly flared up had gone out again.

It had become very late. The streets were so sad, the lanterns were burning very dimly, and the H8U gates had menacing, gloomy expressions.

When Toni returned home, he found it just as he had expected, the Yater had left and his mother was sitting in the dark room crying. She asked

She didn't know where Toni had been, she just cried even harder when she heard his footsteps.

After a while she got up and switched on the light. Toni saw that her blouse was torn at the shoulder and her left cheek was swollen. The colourful glass vase that her father had bought at the last fair was lying smashed near the stove.

"Now father's gone back to the pub," moaned the mother, who had to have someone to talk to about her misfortune; "now he'll drink all the money away. Tomorrow we'll have nothing ... I paid the interest today ... oh God" Toni was silent and didn't try to comfort his mother. He couldn't agree with her. He thought. that she should have left her father alone.

He continued to think all night long in his bed, which was made in the drawer of the old Sola. A narrow bed in which you would destroy your elbows if you tried to turn round. But his thoughts didn't care about that, they were all over the place and overcame the confinement. Amerila lay there, beaming, and her father stepped in front of the picture, leaning forward slightly as if peering into the distance. Then he heard his mother crying again and he had to think that his father was hard and cruel to let her suffer like this and to fulfil her wish.

Around mid-morning, Toni heard his father's footsteps on the wooden staircase of the old house. It took quite a while for him to reach the top. In the meantime, Toni had left his subway drawer and slipped into the kitchen to wash himself.

The father rumbled into the next room. An armchair

crashed to the ground. An anxious and reproachful voice called for calm and the V8ter thundered loudly against it. Then it was quieter for a while ... Then the reproachful voice began again ...

"I don't have any money," said the /\/tutter, "you're not thinking about us. Now we're supposed to live off the air again."

"I'm only ever supposed to think of you denLen, whatt And never of me, eh?" Toni himself felt a roughness in his throat when he listened to how rough the words sounded. Each one was as if covered in fur, its lurid hairs sticking to his throat. But Toni still didn't turn away from his father as he usually did when he came out of the stuffy air of the pubs.

"Yes ... First you chase me out of the house ... then there's crying , maybe I should listen to you ... your stupid stories about getting married, which I'm fed up with. I'm fed up with everything. If you were nilt and the boy, I could go to America. No one could stop me." A boot crashed against the bed. "And I'm going to America, too, paB up ... I'm still going ... I'd like to see that ..."

Toni crept out of the door, down the stairs and hid behind the laundry roll in the front room. There he sat and pondered. Something new was there, something terrifying. If it wasn't for him, his father could go to America and become a rich man there. A grasp had come over the child, a contact with a soul he had never known before. It was a deep pain to be the obstacle and to stand in his father's way,

But he also felt proud, because he was not nothing, he meant something and something depended on his decision. His father had hurt Toni a lot, but the boy loved him more than ever in that hour.

After Toni had been sitting behind the laundry roll for a while, the apprentice baker banged his heels against the front door. The caretaker Lam sleepily came out of his basement flat and opened the door. Toni Lonnte left the house unseen five minutes later.

The bright morning lay over the wide square. Everything wore its magic colours: silver and pink. Toni walked through the streets as if through a new world. Everything seemed different to him and he found himself lost. He noticed a lot of things that he hadn't noticed before. The arrangement of the paving stones impressed itself on him with a strange sharpness; the fact that the sign of the pub "Zum lustigen Tiroler" was hanging askew seemed so marvellous to him that he stopped for a while and stared at it. Then his gaze slid to the notice board on the corner and lingered on the red poster of the tightrope walker Richard Richardson, whose real name was Wenzel and who had such eerie eyes.

And then Toni suddenly realised what he had gone out looking for. That was what had been worrying him all night and had driven him out onto the street in the morning. There was the call, put into words, the invitation that drove him to make a decision. Toni loved to have his decisions determined by the divine hint of chance, he tried to read the future from it. Every event on the street

be interpreted as a prophecy. Toni could decide to do or not to do something, depending on whether the next person round the corner was a man or a woman.

He wanted a judgement from God. A judgement from GodÎ If he happily crossed the rope on the tightrope walker's back, then he had proved that he was not afraid and knew how to defy danger and therefore deserved to be taken to America, but if he lost, then everything was over and at least he was no longer an obstacle in his father's path.

Toni was gripped by a deep sense of satisfaction about himself. He wept with happiness at his courage. At first he thought of leaving a letter for his parents, and perhaps writing a few words to his teacher. But then he changed his mind, because after some sad wallowing in thoughts of death, he was confident of a good outcome.

Time passed and by eight o'clock he was outside on the meadow behind the "Zur Sonne" inn. The sea dancers were already out of their large wagon and Richard Ridiardson was loading the rolled-up wire rope and the large safety net onto a handcart with the help of the other man.

Toni approached hesitantly.

The tightrope walker looked up and looked down when he saw the boy. "It gives you a rest, doesn't it," he said,

"You would like to become a tightrope walker."

Toni looked the man in the eye: "Do you already have someone who will let you carry them?" he asked.

"No ... It seems that there are no great heroes in your city. No one is in the mood."

Toni was silent for a while, then he said: "I'd like you to carry me over the rope."

surprised, the man looked the boy in the face. "You ... What are you thinking9 You can go straight back home. Nothing will come of it."

Toni anxiously stepped closer. "I beg you," he said pleadingly, "I beg you, take me with you ... I beg you." A whole host of reasons had been added to that first impulse and had reinforced his decision. This adventure would give Toni a superiority over his schoolmates that would never again be shaken. No one would dare to mock him any more. He would be one of the recognised leaders of the class and perhaps he would even escape the punishment he was facing tomorrow.

The tightrope walker looked at the boy indecisively. "What will your father say to that9 He'll come after me ... No, there can be no question of thatl I'll be locked up in the end ..."

"No - my father authorised it, he sent me here," Toni lied. It didn't matter what means he used to achieve his goal, as long as he achieved it.

"So - what's your father'2" asked the rope dancer.

"Factory worker."

"And your mum?"

"She washes for the people."

"It's the five guilders, Wenzel," the other man interjected, "take it with you." "You should take the five guilders home, wast," he turned to Toni.

"Jal"

"And you're not afraid at all?" asked Wenzel. "You're not afraid of falling down at all"

"No."

"There you go - as far as I'm concerned. Come along."

It was done. Toni stood back with a pounding heart and watched as the men loaded the handcart even more. He could already see the effect of his heroic decision. The children in the troop, who had mocked him yesterday, now looked at him with completely different eyes and treated him almost like one of their own.

When the chief had finished his work, he turned to Toni: "We'll go into town now and put up the rope, you stay here until everything is ready. 11 You know, it's not good to watch the preparations. You get restless and anxious. At half past ten, you and the woman will join us."

Then the two men harnessed themselves to the wagon and drove off. The children, apart from the two youngest who were not yet able to walk, followed behind.

Toni stayed behind by the green car. At first, the two women didn't bother with him; they had their hands full washing the dishes and preparing lunch. A few curious people had rejoined them and were standing around in groups. Toni kept very close to the green wagon so that you could see that he had a right to be here. When ten o'clock struck from the tower of the parish church, one of the women disappeared into the car for a while and came back.

then returned in colourful Sunday best. She was wearing a green bodice and a one-shouldered red skirt. Toni looked at her admiringly. She was tall and star1 and her face was all torn up with pockmarks.

"So, you d i d n 't do diÔi at all?" she asked, stepping up to Toni. "No," he said, looking up at her. He liked her very much in her colourful costume, which made him think of very distant lands.

The woman shouted something to the other in that unintelligible but melodious language they had been talking to each other in all morning. Then she bent down and kissed Toni on the forehead. He was filled with deep gratitude for this tender touch.

By the time they arrived at the main square, it was almost eleven o'clock. Ailes was black with iron people. High above their heads, the rope stretched across the entire width of the square from the third floor of the Moorish pharmacy to the house opposite - and this opposite house was the one under whose roof Toni's parents lived.

Toni stood frozen.

His first thought was to save himself, to run away, to hide. How terrible that this house had been chosen.

But then a desperate courage came to him. If he resigned now. it was proved that he was unfit and a coward, and he would have to endure the ridicule of his enemies. And America was lost forever. He shook off all his worries and stepped into the hallway of the Moor's Pharmacy, where Richard Ridiardson was already waiting for him. The tightrope walker carried the

garish costume of his station. There was a fitted fabric pulled over his chest and legs, so tight and thin that you could see the flesh shimmering through. Then over this was a 1urze, green trousers and a blue waistcoat. These bright colours looked very strange in the elegant hallway of the Moorish pharmacy, they stood out against the brown wood of the wall panelling, they were picked apart into a thousand pieces by the hanging glass prisms of a ceiling chandelier.

Toni looked around this quiet, secluded hallway of the patrician house with honour and devotion. There were two things that had always attracted him so magically and placed this house at the centre of a heroic circle of thoughts of conquest and success. That strange odour of drugs and spices that greeted you when you walked past the open door. And then my blonde girl, who was always dressed so neatly and cleanly, like the big dolls when they come straight out of the box.

The smell was there, it was so oppressive on my chest and it was as if it was penetrating my body through every pore of my skin. And the blonde girl was there too. She was standing on the first floor of the house, in front of a glass door draped with white curtains, watching with wide eyes as the **tightrope walker** and Toni, followed by a few boys from the troupe, lamented past her. Toni's heart was pounding. He could feel a very strange beat in the beating: "Over the rope - over the rope" And at that moment he felt as if he were doing everything for the blonde girl.

to do. And as if the outcome of his venture had to be decisive for something that was somehow connected to this child.

They climbed up to the attic and Toni saw that the rope had been pulled in through a hatch and attached to a beam. Richard Richardson rubbed the soles of his shoes with a powder, then checked the knot of the rope once more. Tom stood by and watched lim as if it was none of his business.

"Ready," said the tightrope walker, "when we come out, you close your eyes. And you mustn't open them again until we're down there. Understand that if you open your eyes earlier and start fidgeting, we're finished."

Toni promised he would keep his eyes closed. Then the tightrope walker climbed out of the roof hatch and Toni immediately followed him. Over the edge of the roof, he could see part of the square filled with people. Richard Richardson knelt down and took Toni on his shoulders. The boys handed him the long balancing pole from the roof hatch,

"Eyes closed," he commanded and slowly rose to his feet.

Toni obediently closed his eyes, although he would have liked to take another look down. The hike began. Toni felt the roof beneath him recede and his careful stride lead him further and further out into the air. The body of the man beneath him shook and trembled with the strain of all his strength. At first there was a roaring and roaring in the depths, as of turbulent waters, then it faded into a

a quiet hum and finally it became completely silent. Toni knew that the gazes of all these people were now directed upwards towards them, these thousands of eyes were fixed on him and it was as if he could feel the combined effect like a gentle pulling of hair-thin threads and as if they were entering an ever more dididter web in which they would eventually become entangled.

This silence in the depths made him anxious. It seemed to him like a malicious threat, like the announcement of an inevitable fall. And suddenly it came over him as if he had to open his eyes now, as if his salvation lay in returning the gaze of the crowd at least once.

But he forced himself down and squeezed his eyes shut even tighter. The rope had begun to vibrate. He could feel this very clearly and he could also feel how the man carrying him was trying to counteract these vibrations by moving the balancing pole.

Suddenly Richardson stopped and got down on one knee. He knelt in the middle of the Lu(t, into the vibrations and revelry of the crowd.

When he stood up again, he had to regain his balance with a few quick movements of the balancing bar. Toni clasped his hands tightly around the man's neck and felt his larynx rise and fall violently under his fingers.

"Leave it out," it lit up beneath him.

And there it was again, this goal of fine

Threads, this threatening command to open your eyes and look down, to gauge the depths.

Toni could no longer resist ... it had to be ... It was impossible to escape this compulsion that threatened to destroy his whole body if he didn't give in ...

He opened his eyes - then he saw the black crowd in the depths, the thousand upturned faces, white spots on the dark ground. Just below them, the men with the stretched fanqnet followed their course. And opposite, at the window of the attic flat, stood the father and mother, their faces white and distorted, and the mother's hands were clasped in the father's arm with bent fingers ...

It was all enclosed in a single glance, very clearly, with all the details burning like fiery lines.

And then he felt the merciless power of the earth, its hard grill, with which it wants to force down the creatures that rebel against the heaviness.

In mad, hot fear, he grabbed the man's throat even tighter. "Let out ... A sen zul," gurgled the tightrope walker.

Let go ... glide ... fall ... and out whispered death. But life was still there and wanted victory. And it squeezed the boy's eyes shut and loosened his fingers.

The tightrope walker continued on his way and reached
the roof.

The noise of the applause raged up from the depths.

Richard Richardson lowered Toni from his shoulders, stepped to the edge of the dais with him and bowed to the crowd, whose gazes had now become powerless again.

Then he crawled through the skylight with him.

The father and mother stood there, at a loss for words, and the neighbour rushed up to him and felt him over to see if he was really whole and alive. She pulled him towards his mother, who embraced and kissed him, weeping.

The tightrope walker, who had entered the scene in astonishment, finally understood and hurried to get back out through the skylight and make his way back. He suddenly began to fear that he would be called to account and that his assurances would not be believed.

But nobody thought of him. Above the shadow The miracle of salvation hovered above the horror, like the bright glow surrounding the Transfiguration of Christ on the altarpiece in St Ignatius' Church. It was as if the frozen veins were gradually filling up with new blood.

Then they were all sitting in the room over there, mum by the stove, and she had pulled Toni very close to her and was playing with his fingers. Father had pushed a chair to the window. But he didn't look out, even though you could have admired Richard Richardson's main feat: how he lay down on the rope, completely on his back, and stood up again. Toni Melicfier had his arms resting on the window sill and his face pressed into his hands.

The neighbour was sitting at the table in the middle of the room. And she spoke for three: that this had been a warning from God and that it could have turned out very badly and that God should be thanked. But she was happy because until today she had thought the neighbour Melicher was a bad and insensitive person and today she had changed her mind. It had become clear that he liked his boy after all.

When twelve o'clock struck from the tower of the parish church and cia's midday chimes began, she jumped up in fright because she had completely forgotten that her cooker was still cold.

"Thank God," said the father when they got outside.

was.

'But she's right,' the mother replied, 'it was a warning. You shouldn't tempt God. How easily the child could have been taken from us."

The father was silent again for a long time.

Then he lifted his face out of his hands. "Why did you do that, Toni?" he asked, "What did you do? Didn't you think an accident could have happened?"

"I know what made him do it," said the /\/tutter, "He's sad, the poor boy, that it's like this between us - as it shouldn't be ... Do you think a little boy doesn't feel it when they turn him out at school?" And she stroked his head, her ally, with as much tenderness as she had ever shown him.

Something inside Toni screamed: No. He wanted to say what was on his mind. But he couldn't

find any

Words for it. And then his thoughts became so confused that he didn't know what to say.

There was a knock, and one of the Se1l dancer's boys entered.

He stood sheepishly at the door at first, then quickly went to the table and put down a closed envelope. And was out again before anyone had even asked him a question.

The mother opened the envelope and pulled out a five guilder banknote.

She handed the money to her father and he held it in trembling fingers, looking at it like something he had never seen before. "Mother," he said, "the money must not be spent ... ever."

Then he stood up. Toni read a new W'ílen on his face. "No," the father continued, "you shouldn't tempt God. We're going to see the priest tomorrow, mum. The first service is next Sunday. I now know what my duty is."

Then the mother began to cry loudly.

In front of Toni, however, the wonderland of America with its endless expanses faded into a dense fog. A grey wall rose in its place. His future was a long way off

This day was one of sad desolation for Tom. His mother's happiness was meaningless to him. The fate he had conjured up had turned against him.

Towards evening, however, a new hope broke through the grey. It was the time when you could see the blonde girl from the MohrenapotheLe in the city park. She went for a walk with her teacher without ever getting caught in the S1warmth of children playing.

mingle. An irresistible desire for her drove Toni away from the house. If he hadn't been understood here, she would understand and admire him. Perhaps the sight of her would fill all the mi8colour, solve all the confusion.

toni came breathlessly into the park. He shied away from meeting other boys, he was afraid of their questions, and so he walked in a circle around the playground on the path that the blonde girl used to take.

And after a while, he saw her, in her splendid dress with her bell hat, leaning forward at the side of the long, bent-over educator.

Like a big beautiful doll that has just been taken out of its shell.

With a beating heart, his whole soul and hope in his eyes, he stood by her path.

As she approached, he saw that she had noticed him and said something about him to her governess.

O Godl He would rather have run away now. But his soul would not let him go and pleaded through his eyes.

"No," said the governess in a harsh and loud voice, "it is the mer1mal of a low origin to put oneself in such nonsensical danger for money. Such a thing is ugly and mean."

And the blonde girl from the MohrenapotheLe turned her eyes away from him and walked past him at the side of the long lady without looking at him.

Ahead Ahead

It was a terrible pain from the shoulders to the back. to the hips.

Xun Toni could go home again.

He walked and walked and a humming and whirring in his head grew stronger and stronger. And he realised that this was nothing other than the whirring of the machines in an unpleasant hall, the sound of wheels and belts, and that his life was drifting inexorably towards this bubbling cauldron.

Anoiomie

When Alexandre Ségur-Mon(faucon came to the description of the liver while working on his great work on the anatomy of the human body, he realised that he had collected too little material on this subject. It was necessary to learn about it once more and in more detail before he began to write this chapter. He immediately set out to fill in these gaps in his otherwise extensive knowledge. But before he left the house, he was brought a letter from his dear friend Ninon with an invitation that put him in the best of moods.

When he arrived at the Charité, he had Father Krankenwërter fetch him. "Listen, Father Hospital Attendant," he said, "I need a fresh corpse."

"Oh, Monsignor," replied the brother, "you've come at just the right time. We have number 46, and I'm delighted to be able to serve you. It's just about to go out. You can have him in half an hour."

"In half an hour?" said the abbé, rubbing his smooth chin, "that's fatal. I can't need him that quickly. It's five o'clock. I must be in Fontainebleau by seven. And before tomorrow

I'll hardly be able to come back at noon. Is it not possible for you to keep him until tomorrow morning? I must have him very fresh."

The Father orderly looked very nadid: "I don't know, I really don't know if it will be possible. You can believe me that I will try everything ... But don't hold it against me if it doesn't work. By the way, you'd have a splendid brother in him. He is a giant."

"I beg you, Father orderly, to make sure he makes it until tomorrow."

With that, the Åbbé left, and the brother ran to the pharmacy, where he prepared a sleeping powder for his patient.

"Take this, my son," he said as he came to Ńummer 46 with his powder, "and may it do you good." The sick man, who was already half unconscious, took the powder and soon his calm breaths showed that he was asleep. During the night, the father crane attendant checked several times to see if number 46 had died despite the powder. He found him unaltered in his position, with a sorry blush on his cheeks and a steady pulse. When he entered the hospital room in the morning, number 46 was sitting up in bed.

"Oh," said the brother, "it seems you're not feeling too bad."

"Adi. Father crane attendant," replied the lad, "I don't know what's wrong with me. My chest doesn't hurt so much any more, I can cough a lot easier and the phlegm is going away.

my whole neck anymore. They must have given me a miracle cure."

Shaking his head, the priest looked at his patient and then began to examine him. He listened to his chest and back and tapped the flesh here and there with curled fingers.

"Truly, my son," he then said, standing up, "I believe you are on the way to recovery."

Number 46 looked at the Father with tears in his eyes. Then, folding his hands, he said: "If only Cott would let me..."

"Well, well," grumbled the brother, "G o d won't mind. But what will the A b b t say?"

"Which AbbéS What is it with him"

..nothing, nothing . . . now lie down again and cover yourself up. I forbid you to ask. I don't want you to exert yourself."

Father left, but from time to time he was driven to check on his patient. "Wei8 Cott," he murmured when he saw him lying calmly and almost comfortably in his bed, "he's really going to get better. What will the abbé say to that?" Towards noon the reverend gentleman from Fontainableau returned, rosy and fresh and in the best of spirits.

"Well, my dear fellow," he called out to Father Zéphyrln, "I can get to work. go? When did he die9"

"Ah, Reverend Sir," replied the Father, "iii almost think he's not going to die at all."

What does that mean?"

Well, it seems as if he has the absldit, healthy

to become. The powder I gave him has, I assume, brought him back to the Belne."

"Oh," said Abbź, rubbing his delicate pink-powdered klnn vigorously with his slender, elf-bone-coloured hand, "that's fetal."

"It's not my fault," said Father Zéphyrin, "I never thought that my powder would be so effective. By the way, Your Honour would have to take this upon himself. If you hadn't gone to Fontainebleau, number 46 would have been dead and cut to pieces by now."

"At least I want to take a look," grumbled the Ăbbé, "at what mm has missed."

And the father led him to the sick man's bed. "Well, my boy," he said, after he had pawed at him for a while, "you've just caused me a lot of trouble."

The patient looked at his visitor in amazement.

"la, yes, my dear. You insist on getting well. And I was very happy to give you your liver. You must have a lovely liver." said the crane with a laboured swallow:

"Excuse me, honourable sir...I"

"Oh, what soil can you do now - if it's already that far. make sure you get well soon. We want to wait. So see you another time, my friend."

Once upon a time, Fontainebleau was to cause an inconvenience in the life of Abbé Alexandre Ségur-Montfaucon. That was when

Instead of travelling to the border without delay like most of his acquaintances, he missed a night in Fontainebleau to bid farewell to his beloved Coralie, Ninon's n o t h e r n a n d follower. Someone among the servants must have betrayed the abbé to the Ja1obins, because at dawn Coralie's country house was surrounded by guards and the abbé was taken prisoner and dragged away without even being allowed to put on his trousers.

"It's a Spa8," said the leader of the guards. "The audience should see that nowadays the nobility is going under the sans-sculottes."

That was a very annoying way to be dressed, but the abbé was even more annoyed that he was not allowed to bring his toilet cubicle into the prison. It contained a whole host of extremely important and necessary items, some of which were almost as indispensable as air or water. It was more than embarrassing that he had to wait for all these files, brushes and combs, and the abbé saw with increasing sadness how his beautiful hands looked more and more neglected from day to day. On the other hand, rnan allowed him to read the corrections to his now completed work on the anatomy of the human body, which was already in print.

"Because," said the prison warden, "a good anatomy is truly a necessity for our time, which is so interested in the human body that it cuts everyone in two to see what's inside."

The trial against the Åbbé was short and without incident. Coralie was sitting in the spectators' gallery, but she tried to draw attention to herself through inappropriate behaviour when the count was sentenced to death. She contented herself with sending a note to the abbé through the count's wife, which read: "Farewell! It was very nice! I will always think of you. Your Coralie."

On the evening of that day, the count was taken from the common ker1er to a small cell, and shortly afterwards an emissary of the revolutionary tribunal entered his room.

"You wish?" asked the abbot, looking around the cell, not knowing what to offer the visitor to sit on.

"I come to tell you, citizen Ségur, that 8
The execution will take place tomorrow morning."

"I thank you for your endeavours," replied the Count and dismissed the envoy with a smile.

The man did not leave, however, but remained standing next to the door, looking at the abbé with a gaze that was like an unpleasant sensation. "Can I perhaps be of service to you?" he finally asked

Then the revolutionary man made two jerks so that he almost collided with the Abbź: "Of course you don't know me anymore. Citizen Ségur9" he asked.

I apologise for any inconvenience. It is not crínnerlídi . . "

"Je, it's also been a few years. It was in

of the Charite. You had such a great desire to learn my liver."

"AG ... You are number ... which one was it dodi glaich ... I think it was 49."

"t6, I've memorised it better, 46 ... I've recovered completely, as you can see. Fate had just destined me to become secretary of the tribunal and to be there tomorrow when they cut off your head, citizen Ségur."

The abbé smiled: "Well, my dear, I hope you are satisfied ... as far as I am concerned. '

"I am convinced that you saved my life back then, citizen. If you hadn't postponed the inspection of my liver until your return from Fontainebleau, it would never have occurred to the good Father Zéphyrin to give me some of his famous powder."

"It gives me pleasure to have preserved the life of a man who is perhaps called to play a role in these strange times."

"So you understand that II must be grateful to you in a certain sense. Unfortunately, I can't save you from the big knife. But I would like to fulfil one or more of your wishes, if I can. And I want to pass the time for you, this last hour, which I have been told is very unpleasant."

"Oh ... You are very kind, and I accept your kind offer. And I would like to make you a first request: I am reluctant to say you to you …"

I understand. You want me to distance myself from you a little and not say you to you either. That

Tribunal saves you a lot of trouble by having your head chopped off tomorrow. You wouldn't get used to the new order of things. Moreover, it occurs to me that you have a mistress. If you should wish to see her again, I can make it possible."

"Thank you very much. It's getting a bit late and Coralie is not a fan of being dragged out of bed at night. I'll make you a suggestion. Since you're already sacrificing your sleep for me, let's play a game of Sdïach together."

"I'm happy to do it." The secretary left for a short while and then returned with a chessboard. The abbé sat on his bed, the secretary on the dustbin, and they had the washstand between them. After the pieces had been set up, the secretary asked: "And the stakes . . .?"

"QÏ\, I know what else I would like if I were to win. I'll tell you when we've finished."

...In case I win," said the Secretary, "please allow me to come tomorrow. - afterwards - to be allowed to look at your liver."

I have nothing against it," replied the abbot.

Then they began to play. It was an incredibly captivating game between two evenly matched opponents who were well acquainted with all the subtleties and surprises of the game. However, as the iv\orgen began to dawn, the abbé had gained the upper hand and drove the secretary into a corner. Nach After a while, the game was over. "Ifir Könlg is dull sat down," said the abbé, standing up.

"I will get over my defeat. If only we have really defeated your king. So will you tell me what else I can do for you, since you have won?"

.,Idi ask Sia to send for my toilet cubicle," said the abbé.

"Right away," replied the secretary. -

Within an hour, the small ebony box with inlaid ivory and mother-of-pearl work in Japanese flavour was at hand. The abbé unlocked it and took out a myriad of fine knives, files, brushes, hooks, seed seals and boxes. He spread them out in front of him on a clean handkerchief, looked at them lovingly, changed the order and then slowly and with great cenuB began his toilet. The secretary sat on the abbé's bed and was astonished to see that each of these things had its own purpose. had used.

When the first ray of sunlight came through the barred window like a bright, flashing knife and hit the ceiling of the cell, voices and the clink of weapons could be heard outside in the courtyard. At the same time, many footsteps approached the door of the cell. The secretary got up from the bed: "Mr Abbé..." he said.

"I've just finished," he murmured and quickly rubbed his fingernails with a soft leather cloth to give them a rosy sheen.

The bolts were pushed back.

"Let's go," said the abbé, throwing the cloth on the table and turning to the Tñre.

"F a n t e R e s e

When my Uncle Hilarius came to us with the news that Auntie Resa was coming tomorrow, I preferred that to someone bringing me a new toy or a book. Because Auntie Resa was much, much more interesting than all the toys and books and you could have all the fun with her that toys and books couldn't handle. Aunt Resa wasn't really my aunt at all.

But that didn't matter, because Uncle Hilarius wasn't everyone's uncle either and yet everyone called him that. But he really was my uncle and that's why it seemed to me that I had much more claim on Aunt Resa than anyone else. Because the two of them somehow belonged together. That much was clear to us, even though they weren't husband and wife and didn't live together. But there had to be a bond, even if we couldn't say which one. It was clear from the way Uncle Hilarius announced her arrival, from the trembling of his voice, from the joyful look in his blue eyes. When Aunt Resa was due to arrive, we all went out, a whole crowd of boys and girls, to welcome her. We went out on Prague, Brno or Vienna Streets as far as the S¢hwanen pub, as far as Handelhof

or to the "broken sausage" and that was our favourite place to go, because there was a large forest right next to the houses that were called like that, where there were strawberries and blueberries and where we **could** pass the time very well.

But OnLeI Hilarius was always among us and looked after a large bouquet of flowers for Aunt Resa. He was not to be trifled with, and if someone did something that could put the bouquet in danger, he was likely to lash out from time to time.

Aunt Resa was not really beautiful. She had a stiff neck and a real black beard on her upper lip and chin. You could never see that more clearly than when she came back from her trips and hadn't shaved for weeks. She was also shapelessly fat and had a waist like a black pudding. Her hands were large and full of freckles, each surrounded by a ring of hairs, like a small yellow pond surrounded by reeds. What she had too much hair on her face and hands, she had too little on her head. Here, only a few thin grey strands lay firmly glued to her skull and the scalp shone through.

So Aunt Resa was not actually beautiful and the legend that circulated about her must have been historically well founded, so that it could not be shaken by appearances. This legend claimed that T8nte Resa was once the most beautiful girl far and wide. So beautiful that men ran after her like dogs. So beautiful that never

She was so beautiful that a famous painter once wanted to paint her, if her /\/mother had allowed it.

Now all that was left of her beauty was a gleam in her eyes and those beautifully arched brows, which would never have needed Auntie Resa to blow on them with burnt matches and extend them to the root of her nose. In this past, of which the legend tells, the bond that held our Uncle Hilarius and Auntie Resa together was also knotted. We already felt that then, but today I can express it, today I give this bond a name. It was his youth that Uncle Hilarius loved in Aunt Resa, it was his youth that he awaited on the street and to whom he gave a bouquet of flowers. presented.

If we waited long enough, a cloud of dust would rise up on the road. And when the cloud of dust came closer, we would see the nodding head of the little horse and the linen cart it was harnessed to. And in the cart, Aunt Resa sat under a canvas roof and called out to us from afar: "Greetings, God, Bandel"

Then we surrounded the carriage, stroked the little horse, jumped into the luh with happy feet and shouted: OnLel Hilarius was carrying his bouquet of flowers and had tears in his eyes. And then Aunt Resa jerked to the side so that OnLel Hilarlus could just squeeze in next to her; the rest of us climbed into the back of the carriage,

We lay down on the straw and counted the bottles to see how many Aunt Resa had emptied on her journey this time and how many were still full. But the empty ones were always far more than the full ones.

So we went into town and we were always allowed to go straight to Aunt Resa's flat. It was in an old tower that had once formed part of the fortification. A piece of the town wall was there and a small house was attached to it, which also belonged to Aunt Resa. She also had a house in the town, but it was rented out and earned its owner so much that she had to make the journeys in the little car. In front of the tower and the wall was the old moat and a part of it was Aunt Resa's garden, where many flowers grew in spring and summer and where there were lots of apples and pears in autumn. But the most beautiful thing was the tower tent. It was more worthy than other rooms in the town because it was completely round and each of its four windows faced a different side. Aunt Resa slept up here and above the bed hung a lot of pictures of a beautiful girl and a blossoming woman. And every time we accompanied Aunt Resa to her tower room after the reception, Uncle Hilarius would point to these pictures and say proudly: "Look, this is what your Aunt Resa used to look like. seen."

The pictures were hanging very shakily, because the room was round and it's difficult to hang pictures there. If the window was open and a gust of wind blew in, the whole thing, which was under

Glass and frame preserved the past through each other. One place on the wall, however, was marked with black lines and there was no picture at all. But when Uncle Hilarius pointed to the photographs and praised Aunt Resa's past, Aunt Resa always pointed to the empty, framed space and said: "That's the most beautiful thing there."

This was the place where the famous painter's picture should have hung, the picture that had never been painted.

Then Aunt Resa began to unpack. She had brought something for everyone, a little something, a picture of a saint from some famous place of pilgrimage, a pocket knife, a notebook, a small mirror, a small comb. Uncle Hilarius always got an asdia bowl. He kept all these asdia bowls carefully. I saw a whole sdiranL full of them on him.

Finally, Aunt Resa sdilo8 her toilet table and picked up the soap dish and razor. While she artfully sdilug sdiaum, soaped her lips and chin and began to shave in front of the mirror, she talked about her journey.

That was the highlight of the delights that Aunt Resa offered us. Dlese romantic stories of journeys and adventures while she shaved.

"Yes," she said, "what do you know† What do the people here know anyway? You all know nothing about the world. How big the world is and how beautiful the world is. You could travel there from dawn till dusk, as fast as you like, as many days a year

and on Sundays and public holidays too, always in one direction and you'd never get anywhere." That was what drew us to Aunt Resa in particular, that she had such an outrageous idea of the greatness of the world, an idea that was more beautiful than any fairy tale, that dazzled us, intoxicated us, confused us and made us happy. This imagination was a treasure to which no one else had the key but Aunt Resa. There was something outside, beyond the hills that we could see from the city wall, that was big, round, transparent like crystal, always turning in circles, and it hung like a bell. That was the world. And Aunt Resa came straight out of it on her little cart with the little headless horse in front, and when her time was up, she drove off. straight into them again.

But it was the same thing that separated Aunt Resa from the rest of the population of our town.

For it must finally be said that not everyone thought of Aunt Resa the way we children and Uncle Hilarius did. On the contrary, there were a lot of people who, for all the recognition of the dysentery she had once brought to the city, now felt no admiration for her at all.

My father, for example, called her a crazy s&itch who should finally stay put, because the oven was there for old women, and this driving around in the world was as stupid as possible.

Our good citizens were exceptionally se8ful people, and they didn't understand how to get into the

travelling out into the world. If you didn't have urgent business outside, you really preferred to stay in the city, enjoy your cosy home, go to the pub with the family on Sundays and say to the world beyond the hills: "You're looking good for a long time." And the fact that someone could be so obsessed with travelling, and that they did it in such a peculiar way as Aunt Resa, did not make sense to our citizens.

It is possible that as children they too might have listened to such an old travelling aunt with enthusiasm and thought, but over the years they must have forgotten that they too might once have thought that the world was round, transparent like crystal and rang like a bell.

But I had to agree with them later that they thought Aunt Resa's way of travelling was strange.

She had been married twice. First with Selcher Kummer. He had been wealthy and had left her a nice little packet of securities, from which she drew a good amount of interest. Then with the baker Wlach. From him she had inherited the house in the town, the tower, the part of the town wall and the garden in the old moat. But after her second husband had been dead for a while and Aunt Resa had built enough walls around him, she had fetched some banknotes from the savings bank and bought the little cart and the little horse. And now she had started travelling. When spring came, the wagon was taken out of its shed, Iris1 washed, probably

The horse was then pulled out of the stable, groomed and harnessed. A generous number of bottles of wine and liqueur were stowed in the straw at the back to fortify the body, and then Aunt Reso drove off.

After four, five, six, even seven weeks, she came back, cancelled the parties in her house, redeemed the coupons on her securities and rested for two or three weeks. Then she went out into the world again. This was repeated three or four times during the fine season.

She travelled along the country roads, letting her horse go as it pleased, sitting under her canvas roof, looking to the left and right and occasionally reaching behind to catch one of her wet friends by the neck and take a good nip.

It goes without saying that you experience more when travelling in this way than by train. And that's why Aunt Resa could tell us so much about scary forests full of robbers, about strange encounters, about moonlit nights. All stories that proved how big and strange the world was.

But Aunt Resa was not afraid of this big world, which was so strange. "I'm an Amazon," she used to say, and when you saw her shaving, it was easy to believe her.

But when she was finished with her stories, she always added: "It would all be really nice and good if only it weren't for those darn men

would be. You don't have any peace from them. I don't know what they're always after me for. Am I still so seductive? But they can't be tamed. Well - that's not for you children. I'll tell Uncle Hilarius about it when we're alone."

Uncle Hilarius always betrayed a certain excitement as soon as Aunt Resa arrived at this point in her report, and even we couldn't miss it. I now know why.

Wasn't it his youth that se8 and spradi, as if it had always been alive and real since

And Uncle Hilarlus would perhaps never have grown old, he would never have got grey hair and would never have walked bent over as he did recently if he hadn't lost touch with his youth and had to turn his back on it.

But that was a strange story, and it began when Uncle Hilarius came to us one day and told us that old Weiner had inherited five thousand guilders from someone.

He had no idea that this inheritance from old Weiner was destined to kill his youth.

The Weiner was an old labourer and a well-known figure in the town who was part of the street scene. However, he was no ordinary labourer, but one who had the charm of the mysterious. We called him Barabas. I don't remember whether one of us came up with this name or whether it was already known from the children's books.

generations before ours. But he got to the heart of the matter in a nutshell. For in our parish church there was an altarpiece depicting the robber Barabas, the desolate fellow to whom the VoIL of Jerusalem gave freedom in Christ's place. This Barabas wore a large, floppy coat and a strange, fli1ted cloak with a hood, and he had a black, tangled beard on his face.

And that's exactly what old Weiner looked like. Except that he wasn't a robber and a wild fellow, but a poor devil who had a hard time in the world. He had no permanent lodgings at all, but roamed the streets day in, day out. In summer, he slept in a compound or outside the city in a ditch, but in winter he found a corner in a stable somewhere with a landlord. Such a vagabond life was against police regulations, which required every citizen to have a fixed abode. But the police were careful not to ask old Weiner where he was staying, because otherwise they would have been forced to provide for him themselves.

The mysterious thing about this WerLelmann but was

the old, dirty snap sack he wore under his robber's coat. It hung down his front and hit his legs with every step he took. When the coat came apart, you could see the thing dangling. But the snap sack, which looked no different from what beggars usually carried, concealed something extraordinary. For it was said that the old weeper had a body diadem and the sack served him

somehow to hide his infirmity. This piqued our curiosity and we would have loved to know what was actually going on. That's why we did everything we could to have a look inside the SacL. We drew up a lot of lists, one always better than the other, as we told old Weiner. But he was on his guard and kept us at bay. He pulled his robber's cloak tightly around him, stayed wrapped up summer and winter, and only when he wanted to play a tune on his wobbly coat did he put his arms through the slits in the sides of the cloak.

And now this poor devil had suddenly inherited five thousand guilders from a rich relative. Five thousand guilders, that was like the treasure of lnca for a man through whose hands this sum had perhaps never passed in his whole life. At first he walked around for two days as if he had been hit over the head with a wooden bat. He must have thought that the pretence of such a possibility was a *very* special malice that the world had devised against him. Mistrustful, he avoided all people, a8 nothing, tranL nl1ts and never once stretched his arms out of the dumbbell slots to let his wer1el whimper.

It was only on the third day that he gradually began to realise what turn his fate had taken. The sign by which this could be recognised was that he was drinking himself into a murderous stupor. He had spent a whole day lying outside the town in the "Zur Sonne" inn, but - as was his wont

The new situation was no longer in the stable on the litter, but in one of the rooms for better carters. And if we had been present at the time, we would probably have had no difficulty in satisfying our curiosity and seeing what was actually in the snap sack. Despite the fact that old Weiner had not exactly started his new life in a dignified manner, the confirmation of the rumour of the inheritance raised him in the esteem of his fellow citizens. He rose from the swamp of the lowly and despised and was able to choose his place closer to the sun of general esteem. For, as is usually the case in small towns, money was almost the only measure of personality here. There were already some people who no longer thought it inappropriate to exchange a few words with the old weiner on the street and give him friendly, benevolent advice on how he could be more successful. should invest his money.

For Aunt Resa, too, WerLelmann's inheritance meant that he had entered the circle of people to whom one can pay attention.

"What will he do with his money?" she asked Uncle Hilarius one day. "A man like that doesn't know what to do with his money. He thinks that five thousand guilders is enough for eternity. And there are always people around to help him. He should have someone to **take** care of it for him.**"**

The matter must have gone round and round Aunt Resa's head for so long that she could no longer avoid finding out about it,

what Weiner intended to do with his money. It was learnt that she had invited him to visit her and talk to her about the matter.

Uncle Hilarius was quite astonished by this approach. He had not thought that Aunt Resa's interest would go so far. And the day after he found out, he paid a visit to the widow's tower room.

When he opened the door, he saw the old Weiner really and truly sitting at Aunt Resa's table. And this table was beautifully laid, the coffee pot was there, as well as two s1ales and a cut cake, and there were even a few roses from the garden in the glass vase next to the tin of sugar. The workman, however, sat in his patched robber's coat in front of all these marvellous things, had a bowl half full of a light brown coffee and held a slice of the golden yellow cake in his hand. His slouch hat lay on the floor beside him. Aunt Resa didn't seem twice as pleasant to see my uncle. In the meantime, she was sitting down and said, pointing to a third chair: "Yes, Mr Weiner has come to see me to talk about his inheritance - it's a tidy sum and it would be a shame to let it slip through my fingers. \When a person has a real friend, there are always a lot of false friends who give him good advice in the way that suits them best."

Old Welner, his mouth full, washed the cake down with a sip of KaPee and then nodded. OnLel Hilarius, who later told me everything in detail when I was older, said he

looked like a dog that had changed masters and gone from a bad one to a good one. In his eyes, mistrust and fear are still fighting with astonishment at so much luck. And perhaps it was then that Weiner realised for the first time what the change in his circumstances actually meant for him. He had gone from being a homeless vagrant and beggar to a man who was able to live under cover and in peace, and another man was there to lend him a helping hand. to help.

"Yes," he said to the Specknazl innkeeper, where he used to get the scraps from the kitchen and where he was now allowed to sit in the guest room because he paid for what he ate, "yes ... Now it's different, you see ... different... I'll be a man... if I always have something warm in my stomach and can manage in bed."

Back then, when Uncle Hilarius met old Weiner for the first time at the Resa, the old man didn't come out of his shell much. And the others didn't talk much either. The Weiner finished his bowl of coffee and didn't take long to be forced to take a second bowl. But perhaps he did it more out of embarrassment than because he was already so full at home. Aunt Resa was embroidering on a table runner. And Uncle Hilarius sat there and didn't know what to say. After a while he got up and left, and Aunt Resa held him back with a word. I1 still remember exactly how Uncle Hilarius

came to us after this visit. His face was all red and shiny, as if he'd been on five floors, even though our flat was on the mezzanine floor. After throwing his hat on the piano, which was quite contrary to his uncle's usual tidy habits, he came to the window.

"Well, well," my father asked, "what happened? Do you have fire on the roof9"

Uncle Hilarius said nothing, but just looked out of the window. From this window you could see into the old moat, which was now full of gardens, and beyond the moat you could see a weathered wall and a tower above it. The gardens below were filled with greenery, which rose up in them and seemed to have no room, for it overflowed the wall and sent its runners up the tower as funny climbing vines of wild roses. One of the tower windows was open and a curtain was waving out of it, like a flag or a scarf to wave to someone.

"Aha," said my father with the spotty tone he so often used towards OnLel Hilarius, "Knight Toggenburg ..., and so he said, a Leidie, there one morning, after the Fenstar ... and so on. Would you like a cognac?"

"Say something," OnLel Hilarius turned round now, "have you heard anything about the story with the old weiner"

"Da8 he inherited mate"

"Yes ... and ..."

"Since the widowed Mrs Wlach, your Resa, is looking after him …†"

"So you know it audit"

"Why nilt? It's conspicuous enough."

"She has a good heart," said On1eI Hilarius, taking one of my school books from the table as if he wanted to see how far we had already driven our tunnels into the mountain of science.

My father looked sharply at my uncle: "Don't kid yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"The one with the good heart."

"Doesn't she have a good heart? Why else would she take care of old Weiner?"

"Oh God, you know that very well. I'll ask you again if you want a cognac."

"Why should she take care of him? She has a good heart. She knows that he would spoil everything, and she can't look at that. He needs someone to hold his hand ... and ..."

"Yes, yes, yes ... everything, because she has a good heart. So for the last time: do you want a cognac?"

Uncle Hilarius drank the cogna1 down furiously, with a face as if he had been served bitter water. He did it less because he wanted to drink than to finally get rid of this annoying interjection.

After a while, during which he had looked out of the window at the tower, he began again: "Such a poor devil, like Welner, who has never seen such a lot of money together, doesn't know what to do with it.

If he doesn't have someone who means well by him ... that's Christian, that's noble …"

"But stop it, I'm not saying anything against her."

"What could you say against them? If someone with such altruistic motives …"

"Yes, yesi It's all well and good ..."

"But you don't want to understand when someone is driven by their good heart. In everything, it is selfishness that must be sought."

"With Aunt Resa, it's the good heart."

"So why else would she do that? Old Weiner really isn't that attractive a person. You could even say he's **quite** unappetising.'"

"But his inheritance is quite appetising for anyone who has a taste for money."

"You don't want to say ...t"

"Look: you know as well as I do that the widow Wlach is only interested in his five thousand guilders."

"This is... this is..."

"She'll take it off him and hang him out there."

Then Uncle Hilarius reached for his hat, put it on - something he never did in the room - and shouted: "Your motives go beyond your horizon."

"She will marry him if she doesn't help him in some other way. Just like she did with the Selchermeister Kummer and then with the baker Wlach."

"You dare her to be mean . . I didn't realise you had such a low opinion."

"Stop it, otherwise you'll have to drink a cognac."

"Ridiculous, she's going to marry him - Hal Lächer-

"Hasn't she spent her whole life looking for money? What? The whole town knows that and you know it too. Only you don't want to know."

"Ridiculous, she's going to marry old Weiner ... You just have to laugh ..."

"It's all about the money with her. So why didn't she marry you and three or four other people she liked as much as you?"

"She liked the Selcher Kummer even better."

Yes - his bonds were better for her. That's why she married di1 nilt. Because you're a poor devil. And if she liked the grief so much, then what was the way he died? You're a young Greek god, but you were always prettier than the baker Wlach with the O-feet and the abscesses on your neck. After the death of Kummer, you were still free and single. Why didn't she take you? You would have taken it straight away. But you were still a poor dog and have remained so to this day. Wlad' was a different guy with his apartment block and all that ... And now the Weiner ... should you be surprised?"

On1eI Hilarius sat on the sofa, squeezed into a corner and listened to what my father, who had finally become angry, said. He was shrivelled up like a "dying piggy" made of rubber that was beginning to run out of air. When

When my father had finished, he was still silent, playing with a tassel hanging from a pompously decorated back cushion. "Yes ... that's how people are ..." he then said quietly, "what they can't grasp must somehow ... Oh yes," and seized by a new thought, he continued,
"and that she loves nature so much, that she goes travelling, that she loves children ... are the signs of a mean and selfish soul"

My father felt sorry for Uncle Hilarius.
"Well," he said gently, "there are sometimes contradictions in human nature. Who can fathom it all so precisely ... Let's not talk about it."

Uncle Hilarius, however, remained sitting in the corner of his sofa, his pale face shimmering through the twilight, and the §}uaste of the back cushion lay dead in his hand. I felt a great sadness in the room, emanating from my uncle. And I went out and remembered that I had learnt today why the relationship I had thought existed between T8nte Resa and my uncle in the past had become a permanent bond.

Such are the lessons that make us more serious and mature for life.

The following Sunday, we went for a family walk after the Schie8stätte. For me, these walks were partly a horror and partly a delight. The delight was caused by the various attractions that were there: the S1ieRbude, where you could look for moving figures and clay elf heads, the museum with the

The two wax dolls of the Andalusian dancer and the cannibal who swung his club, the swing, the ring toss, the menagerie, not to mention the lower-ranking amusements such as Punch and Judy shows and ring games, about which I was already feeling a little thirsty. Even spending time in the restaurant garden with beer and sausages was one of the delights. But it was an abomination that you had to do all this with your family and were restricted in your freedom of movement. You had to stay neatly in the fold and weren't allowed to move much. And there was always a ghost in the background. That was Professor Lämmermeyer, whom you often met out here and who was greeted with great kindness and asked about my progress. Professor Lämmermeyer in particular gave the impression that the atrocities predominated.

That Sunday, as always, we had a slow

I had walked up and down the alleys of stalls under the huge old chestnut trees twice. I watched longingly as some of the lane boys did the arm wave on the celänder of the caraway meadow. Suddenly someone said: "Sapper- ment, how old Weiner has dressed up."

Truly, old Weiner walked ahead of us. And

He had cleaned himself up so that you were completely dazzled. He had a new floppy hat, grey in colour, and a light-coloured Havel coat that looked as if it had been made from the fur of Karo vom Krebsenwírt, the dark mutt who had turned dog the previous week. But it was probably Lein dog fur,

8 from which the Havelock was made, but real camel hair, for the old Weinar walked along quite contentedly and occasionally stroked his hand carefully over the stole. He pretended to be wiping away a speck of dust, but it was obvious that he was only doing it to caress his new coat. He always looked to the left and right to see if anyone noticed him and how they were behaving towards him. For all his satisfaction with himself, they were still anxious and intimidated looks, and they were as if asking for something that this flowing crowd could grant.

At the time, it all seemed so strange to me, the old man's first impression, his demeanour and his new Havelock, that I might have laughed if there hadn't been something to stop me. At first it was a feeling of heaviness and discomfort. And today I also know that this was a feeling of tragedy in this case: how here was a pariah at the end of his days endeavouring to rise from his lowliness, and how he timidly and cautiously made a first attempt to mingle with other people, uncertain whether they would tolerate him or reject him in indignation would.

The other thing that kept me from laughing was the face of my uncle Hilarius. He always just looked at the old man as he walked in front of us, with his clumsy, short steps, and how he shifted his floppy hat in embarrassment when he saw someone he knew. And there was a stiffness in his uncle's face that covered his otherwise lively features like a mask. Since8 Uncle Hilarius was agitated, he could

I could also see from the fact that Aunt Berta, who had always had a little weakness for him, put her arm in his. She always did that when she wanted to reassure him.

"Now Mrs Wlach will shudder," someone said, and Uncle Hilarius cringed.

When we passed the old winegrower, he greeted us. No-one thanked him, only Uncle Hilarius tipped his hat to him.

I would have loved to know if the old man was still wearing the mysterious snap sack under his new coat. But despite the summer heat, the coat was still closed and the satchel remained as mysterious as before. It seemed to me, however, from the old man's gait, that the thing was still dangling in front of his legs. The cruel prophetess of Mrs Wlach's appearance was to be proved right. Just as the interest in the old weiner was beginning to wane, Aunt Resa came along the alley of stalls, lounging, freshly shaven, with a summer hat of very youthful colour on her head. Her eyebrows came together above the bridge of her nose, and you could still see the traces of the burnt matches with which Aunt Resa had helped her 1ean swing. As she walked along, she was panting quite a bit, for it was hot, and the black pudding was very loosely tied together so that it would fit in the black silk dress.

All of a sudden, the attention he had lost was revitalised.

It's a bridal lift," said my sister, who was married to the master builder Giesel.

"Aunt Resa in the black silk dress," said someone else, "that's a sight for sore eyes."

I don't know whether they had no idea what was going on with Uncle Hjlarius or whether they just didn't think about it at the time. But I felt the cruelty of these remarks and sentences. And I saw how they affected him, how he suffered and how Aunt Berta gripped his arm tighter.

And strangely: in that hour, I felt a stirring inside me. There had been a struggle within me. My father's conversation with the on1eI had left me with an impression that drove me away from Aunt Resa. Without really realising what the accusations my father made against her meant, I felt that they were destructive. Now I turned away from Aunt Resa completely. She walked through the crowd, nodded smilingly to her friends and also gave my uncle a friendly greeting. But that was all on top. You could tell that sle was looking for someone. She met the old winegrower just outside the pub. She held out her hand to him and he took her fingertips. He swayed from side to side with embarrassment. His face, framed by his now trimmed rouge beard, looked like old cheese. Then he turned and walked by her side.

Aunt Resa spoke merrily and thawed on him and he listened, his head bowed devotedly against her right shoulder. So they walked up and down twice, and then they disappeared into the "museum" between the dancing Andalusian woman and the club-wielding cannibal.

Over time, the old winegrower gained a little more confidence. Nothing disappeared from him. Everything remained as it was. Ta "te Resa kept her friendliness and asked him for his daily visit. And the old man came, sat in the tower room, drank coffee and felt more and more secure in a new life.

One evening, I was walking across the main square with my father. In front of us we saw the bright yellow have- lock and the grey floppy hat of old Weiner. It so happened that my father and old Weiner went to the same tobacco shop for their groceries.

As I left the shop, the old man spoke to my father.

"I rau¢h Wirschina now," he said, showing a handful of the long, black-brown stenge1.
"They are better than commi8t tobacco or even stumps from the alleyways."

"Like this," said my father.

But the old man didn't let himself be so easily dismissed and walked alongside us, puffing out his cheeks and then chewing again with his toothless mouth. That was something completely new that I didn't even recognise in our Barabas. And it was true that I had developed this habit with the increasing sense of importance.

You could tell that the old man was full of something. He felt compelled to talk about it. "Yes," he said, "it's all better now, everything . . "

He had also improved his dialect. Or at least he made an effort to do so. But sometimes it sounded so strange, as if he was struggling to speak in a foreign language that he had only recently learnt,

7.

Suddenly he stopped and held my father back by the arm. "You know," he said, puffing out his cheeks and making noises, "I'm going to Mrs Wlach's now."

"Like this?"

"Yes - why not? She's taken such good care of me. So I'm going to move in with her."

"So, you're getting married"

"Heiratent - A kidiern gushed from the old man's kehla. "Marriage - not. Not yet, but - you shouldn't conspire. What is not, will be. Now I'm moving in with her. As a party. She's got a room next to the tower in the wall. Why shouldn't I live in that room9 It's big enough for me. You know, a small room like that ... a bed, a table, a box, an armchair ... is enough. Our own ... Sa1radil And then ... then - Yes, you have to say that ... it's going to be a life." He stopped again and held my father by the sleeve: "We will go on the journey together go ... In the van. We buy a new caravan, a bigger one so that we have room, and a second horse ... Well, because there are two of us. You see, two horses for two people. That's the way it should be, not true So ... yes, that's how you have to live. Then you get something out of it. Two horses ... the money is there. Why shouldn't you, if there's money? You can spend a hundred on something like that, but you can't." And he puffed out his cheeks and made a noise with all his might.

"I wish you the best of luck, everything should turn out the way you want it to," said my father

and stepped into the drugstore with mm, where ar still had something to had to buy.

As we walked back across the main square after a while, we met a well-known bank official. His smile showed that he had something interesting to tell my father.

"You spoke to Barabas earlier," he said, after greeting my father.

In my hometown, everyone knew what they had done and left behind during the twenty-four hours of the day and night.

"You know," the bank official continued, "Barabas" - the man had a lot of fun persistently calling the a(th Weiner by his nickname - "had his pea juice in our depot. He moved all the money today." At this, the official looked at my father triumphantly, in realisation of his message.

"So ... He fixed it? And for what purpose do you think ... what will he do with it?"

"He'll put it somewhere else ... to Mrs Wlach, to ... Aunt Resa." And with a resounding laugh, the official shook my father's hand and walked on, towards another acquaintance, in order to circulate his news in more favourable places.

OnLel Hilarlus became quieter and sadder every day. I felt very sorry for him. My father might have given the others a win1 as to how OnLel Hilarius was doing.

because nobody talked about Aunt Resa and old Weiner any more, even though the whole town was talking about them.

But even this deliberate silence **seemed** oppressive to OnLel Hilarius. Wasn't this proof that he was in agreement with the city in his judgement?

His uncle usually avoided looking over to the tower on the other side of the moat. t1he one time, however, it came over him. Then he stood at the window for a long time and sighed. Over there she was with the intruder, if not exactly under the same roof, at least in close neighbourhood, and they could see each other and be together at any hour. Because a narrow staircase led from the /\/\suerzimmerchen up through the city wall into the tower. Even though Aunt Resa could not use these stairs because of their size, old Weiner was free to use them.

I don't think it was ordinary jealousy that determined my uncle's state. It was perhaps more a premonition, a fear of what was to come, of a catastrophe that could devastate the sanctity of his soul. I conclude this from an experience I had with my uncle at that time.

He used to take me for long walks in the woods when he was in a good mood. But now it had been weeks since we'd done that. The mood for such walks had probably gone out of him completely. I was all the more astonished when one day he brought up this friendly habit all by himself and said

midi asked if I would like to go out with him again. I was ready to do so.

Our path led us past a Calvary, next to a stone quarry across the fields, further and further into the summer. It was very hot and scorching and lay over the landscape as far as the distant blue forest mountains, where the coolness was just beginning. We crossed the Devil's Bridge, an ancient, wooden, overdadite structure, and then continued along the river. Until the evening came. Then everything became very gentle and soft, and the road swung like a big bell. We stopped off at a country inn. On1el Hilarius had spoken little the whole way, so I had become quite timid too. But now, over beer and cheese, my good humour returned and I could no longer bear to sit there in silence.

So I started talking about the school and the professors and the man-killing fights between them and us. What we had done and how they had got to us and how we had taken revenge again. How Mucius Scaevola, otherwise known as Siegfried Kohnstein, had set up the blinds so ingeniously that they came down with a rumble of thunder whenever someone was in danger of being caught swinging. And how we had smeared the maths professor's sponge with ink so that he would then unsuspectingly decorate his shirt and collar with black drawings.

Everything you can't say to anyone at home could be trusted to On1el Hilarius.

He listened to me. But he didn't listen like he usually did.

But he just smiled, so painfully and wistfully that I felt anxious again and fell silent. Then we made our way home. The town *lay* before us, all golden in the evening. From a village behind a wave of hills a furtive ringing rose up. Two people approached between the fields, on a path so narrow that it looked as if they were coming from the /thren. A boy and a girl. They held each other close and didn't want to let go of each other. not around us. The grain rustled around their steps.

Suddenly my uncle grabbed me and hugged me to him. I was already so big that my head reached his shoulders. I could tell from the shaking of his chest and his convulsive sobbing that he was crying. And then he said in a stifled voice: "Why, why are there such things? How can one get beyond ... beyond it? The world is so strange ... What is life? What is life9"

Of course, I didn't want an answer to that at the time. And I wouldn't wish it on him today either.

The whole town was unanimous about the motives behind Aunt Resa's behaviour towards old Weiner. There was only a difference of opinion as to how she would go about achieving her purpose.

Some said she would win it over sick to marry Berabas to have him all to herself. He

would be the Nadifolger of the Seldier Kummer and the Bâckermeister Wlach. The others claimed that it was a spider that would suck its victim dry and then throw him out of the web.

Both the one and the other opinion were confirmed by the strange couple to whom these suspicions were directed.

Old Weiner walked around and presented himself as a grand seigneur after his own fashion. He had now become quite self-confident and felt comfortable in the possession of his importance. And he told everyone who wanted to hear and audi everyone who wanted to hear that he was getting married.

But when Aunt Resa was asked whether this was true, she shrugged her shoulders and said that the Welner was an old man and a fool talks a lot when the day is long, and she had no intention of marrying him. Her only concern was to persuade him to use his money wisely. That was her Christian duty, as no one else had been willing to do so.

During this time, Uncle Hllarius wrote a letter to Aunt Resa. I found the concept of this letter in the papers he left behind. The letter was obviously the result of long reflection, many agonising hours, a struggle with himself. You can see from the numerous corrections how difficult it must have been for him to find the right words to make them do what must have seemed to him the lesser of two obelisks. These traces of an inner struggle make the letter one of the most touching human do1uments.

Ezlautet:

"Dearest friend

I suppose you still allow me to call you that, although you have withdrawn from me so conspicuously in recent times that I have become very sad and have remembered the earlier good times with melancholy. However, the reason for this turning away from all your friends only corresponds to your good heart, and one must not be so selfish as to resent another for doing a good work because he is thereby deprived of our friendship. So give yourself completely to your task and don't think about me. Just once more I would like to address you in the name of our old friendship with a request, a request to take some advice from me. You have taken in an old man and live in close neighbourhood with him. I need no assurances that your relationship with him is one of compassion and charity. But you know the people among whom we live, their narrow-mindedness, their addiction to scandal, their endeavour to accuse everyone of the worst. I implore you, I swear to you, not to give these people any reason to talk back to you. I know it's asking a lot to follow my advice. But perhaps your labouring charity will decide to take this step. Something tells me that you regard the old man's death as your life's work. Do you legitimise your compassion and your pure feelings by

get married. Your life together will then cease to cause offence, people will no longer be able to talk about it, they will finally have to leave you - and me, your friend - in peace. It's strange that I'm giving you this advice; it's out of concern that you might even end up in a falsified marriage because of your mild-mannered behaviour. No one will see this marriage as anything other than the exercise of a serious will to do good, as a supreme sacrifice of your love for your neighbour.

As always, I am all yours with all my admiration

Hilarius."

I don't know whether my uncle Hilarius has received a reply to this letter. I have found nothing among his papers.

But it is so certain that he did not succeed in saving his sanctuary through this sdidn't.

One day, the old \Ÿeiner had disappeared from the town. He had left at night and in fog, taking nothing with him but his coat, his floppy hat and, in any case, the mysterious satchel. It was a regular escape.

The rumour circulated in the early hours of the morning. Aunt Resa herself made sure that it was circulated. Shortly after seven o'clock, she went to her neighbours, Mrs Maresch, the tax collector, and Mrs F\'ear, the post office inspector, in a state of great excitement.

Did they not hear any of the noise at night ...? The tax collector and the post office inspector lived opposite Aunt Resa's tower, but they hadn't heard anything. However, it seemed appropriate to say that they had heard a spe1taLeI, and that it had been quite terrible. In this way, Aunt Resa was cut off from any retreat she might have made if nothing had been heard.

What it has been since

Oh, something terrible, something hideousl The memory of it would m a k e Aunt Resa's hair stand on end .

So what denns So what dennt

Old Weiner himself had escaped, but he would have had every reason to do so, because if he hadn't made off during the night, he would already be in the hands of the police. And Aunt Resa herself would have handed him over to them.

What he has done

Oh, you could hardly make that up, let alone tell it, but Tente Resa had not deserved or expected such a lowly tradition, such malice and such ingratitude from him. He had wanted to go against them . ... but he would be careful never to go back, because thank God! Thank God, there is still a penal code in which there are paragraphs against such offences

We were on school holidays and I enjoyed accompanying my father to the Raseur every other day. Here we sat for half an hour, leafed through the illustrated newspapers and were able to listen to many a meaningful conversation and bland men's words.

hear. The Hühnl razor had emerged from the old school, which made it the duty of its members to entertain their customers while shaving and scratching their beards. Today, shavers have become serious and silent people who behave like the priests of an important cult. Hühnl, however, was reminiscent of the barbers from 'A Thousand and One Nights'. He knew all the news of the city, accompanied it with constant commentary, laid the arabesques of his eloquence around it and spiced it up like only a French chef could spice up his sauces.

The morning after old Weiner's escape, he received us with his mouth full: "Well, what do you say to that? That's great, isn't it, Mrs Wlach? I have the utmost respect. The way she spun the puppet so that he couldn't move. And now ... Open the door, a kick and out. And the money, it jingles in Mrs Wlach's sack. Sapperment, Sapperment - that's high politics, that's the highest diplomacy. Well - an old man like that, who has never had anyone to look after him, must eventually become quite stupid and think he can get away with anything. Who knows how she got him this far. That would be interesting to know. The old donkey has …" and Hühnl quickly drew two circles in the air in front of his forehead with the razor, "been. Three days ago, he had his beard trimmed by me. You should have seen how he acted. 'Well, hut,' he says,

'You'll be hearing from me soon. 'So?' I say,
'I think Mrs Vladi doesn't want to. 'Well,' he says,
'She'll want to' and laughs.

"And you think," my father asked, "that he's going to give up his money and let it go?"

"And whether he'll let her have it, she'll have given him a bad time, with prison and the public prosecutor and the police ... We won't be able to get him back in jail."

Hühnl expressed the opinion of the entire city.

And the city was proved right: the old Weiner disappeared.

Adit days later, Aunt Resa set off on another journey. During these adit days, she walked around with the face of a **martyr,** with the suffering expression of a woman who had experienced a great disappointment. It was high time she thought of her recovery, she told everyone, and travelling was the best way to forget everything. Because the world is big and beautiful and you can travel as long as you want and never come to an end. As she set off on her journey, the town noticed that she had a brand new carriage and a sturdy, capable young horse in place of the old, weak one. And someone who had taken a look inside the car said that the bottle batteries **in the background were** flashing and sparkling.

OnLel **Hilarius** did not turn up to say goodbye. He was ill at home. When he was told that Aunt Resa had asked in astonishment where he was, he turned his head to the other side and remained silent.

He did not expect them to return, whether or not

Although, as always, she had told him when she was coming. She sent him an ashtray made from Carlsbad's bubbling stone with the inscription: Remember me. Uncle Hilarius received the bowl while he was with us. He took it out of its wrapping and looked at it for a while. I can still remember that I was particularly struck at the time by how old my uncle had become. His shoulders were hunched and his head hung forwards. He held the bowl in one trembling hand. Then he packed it up again and sent it back through our maid. without a word.

But he was unable to part with his other ashes, the ones he had sdion. They remained in the box until his death. Then they disappeared and I don't know where they went. -

I saw the old Weiner again after many years. It was in Bolzano and I had already begun to go out into the world to experience its beauty and greatness. The old Weiner must have been about eighty by then, and he had another organ grinder hanging from a leather strap around his shoulders.

I recognised him so easily. He looked like Barabas again on the large altarpiece in our parish church.

The birds of prey

I saw the man for the first time at my bird dealer. While I was eating food for Pips and Moritz and watching a merry throng of budgerigars, an old man stumbled up the wooden steps of the entrance and groped his way unsteadily along the stacked boxes to the counter. And a thin, shaky old man's voice asked if the buzzard had arrived yet.

We pass by many people carelessly in the course of a day, but sometimes it's as if something says to us when we meet them: Take a closer look! I received such a WinL at that moment. The first impression I got of the old man could be summarised in one word: shabby. A slightly too wide, shimmering green skirt, greasy on the chest and sleeves, flapped around a puny figure. The face was grey, wrinkled like a lunar landscape and covered with black spots in the depths of the wrinkles, as if it had been a long time since a thorough cleaning had been carried out, but in front of the eyes sat a pair of glasses with finger-thick, terribly sharp lenses that gave off such a furious flicker of pointed reflections that the man's gaze remained completely hidden behind them.

The buzzard had not yet arrived and the bird dealer put the man off until one of the next days, whereupon the old man left the shop, grumbling as unsteadily as he had come in. I don't know what it was, but at that moment I had the strange feeling that I was walking with someone who had been fated to die, one of those unfortunate people who spend their whole lives on a chain.

"Have you had a look at that man," said the bird dealer, "he's a strange chap. A very good customer of mine. But he runs nothing but birds of prey. He must have brought together a whole menagerie by now. I don't know what he does with the livestock, and I don't think he must be all together, because what sensible person buys a bunch of buzzards. Hawks and owls." And I learnt that the /\/man was called Matthias Weydner, was a retired teacher and lived in a still semi-rural suburb. There really was something strange in the contrasting relationship between the lamentable man and his predilection for the predatory animal that made the memory of this encounter important enough for me to revisit it after a long time on an early spring day when a walk in the March sunshine brought me to that rural suburb. I made my way across the fields, along paths that gave something to every step I took, around the back between the low cottages, some of which were still thatched. As I walked along a pale courtyard wall, from which the plaster had peeled off in many places, so that it looked like

a face after a skin disease, I heard a polyphonic, hoarse croaking and screaming. And immediately the image of the scrawny little man was there, the grey face, the finger-thick eyeglasses. I didn't doubt for a moment that he must live nearby. A ground wing gave me the opportunity to look into the courtyard beyond the wall. I was not mistaken: I saw my husband in front of me. He was standing in the middle of an orphaned courtyard with all kinds of junk piled up in a wild mess in the corners. A small stable and a wooden shed on one long side of the house and the flight holes on the roof of the house seemed to suggest that all kinds of domestic animals had been kept here in the past. But the clapboard roof of the barn was dented, the wooden shed was broken down, and the flight holes were empty and dead. This man seemed to have no interest in tame animals, his only interest was in birds of prey. A whole lot of lines and larger cages stood and hung around in this sad, neglected courtyard, and the old man stood among all these hawks, buzzards, falcons and owls, looking from one to the other with cruelly flashing glasses.

It was the hour of the evening when the crows flew over the suburban village in swarms, making loud noises. They came from the fields and flew over to the forest of paradise, where thousands of them had their roosts. And as they flew over the roofs, their cawing and flapping wings were a bold expression of unbridled femininity, a wild lust for life. And the captured birds of prey in their cages heard and

saw the sdiwarts up there against the bIa8- green evening sky, and they jerked on their perches in miserable restlessness, they peered with half-open wings against the wire grids, they looked up with their heads tilted and responded to the crows' call with pathetic, broken, plaintive sounds. I am convinced that the tigers have a soul. Well, the soul of these poor prisoners, over whose heads the free flocks of crows passed, was filled with a nameless duality, with a devouring longing for which we perhaps have no comparison in our instincts tamed by the intellect. And the old teacher, who held this sum of yearning natural force captive, stood between the cages in his scuffed green skirt and looked from one to the other with a cruel glare. I was outraged and hurried to get down from my pile of earth so as not to have to see this embarrassing spectacle any longer. But the cry of the martyred birds haunted me for a long time. It seemed to me that today I had witnessed one of those cases in which man exploits his superiority over the animal world in a shamelessly unworthy manner. Certainly, there are plenty of zoos, menageries, where wild animals are kept. But there are purposes here that we must respect: science, education. It would be nothing but sentimentality to moan about it. But the meaning that lay in this image of the stunted man among the cages of wild, beautiful birds seemed to me nothing but abysmal malice. From all these impressions and

A strong Ha8 slowly crept into my heart. And at the same time, the man who was the subject of this ha8 became a problem whose solution was more important to me than I wanted to admit to myself. I stopped off at the local pub and tried to find out more about his character and his strange love affair. But they didn't know much more about him than I did. He had settled here a few years ago, didn't socialise with anyone and was considered a fool. That was all.

My desire to get to the bottom of this man's peculiarities was only made more urgent by these oddities, and in the course of the spring I arranged it so that my walks took me to the suburbs a few more times. But I never met him anywhere, and when I climbed the mound to look over the wall, all I ever saw was a neglected, empty courtyard. I was already familiarising myself with the idea of never seeing the man again, because he might be suffering from a protracted, perhaps fatal illness. But one evening in May, chance brought us together.

I was standing on the street and watched a fight between several adolescent boys. They were fighting so hard their hair was flying and I was happy about it. I always enjoy a good, honest, vigorous fight. Suddenly, while the boys were having a good tussle, an adventurous masked figure limped up to the ball and raised a stick. And a wûtenda, thin voice 1eifta:

"Will you be broken up, you leathery gang ... stop, I say, stop ... otherwise IaB

I'll lock you up." The boys scattered, grumbled a little, and for the most part didn't seem to be in a bad mood to go at each other again, but finally backed off; perhaps less out of fear of the stick than of the masked man.

I took a closer look at him. It was the teacher Weydner, wearing an old coat, carefully closed despite the spring warmth, and with thick felt shoes on his feet. His right hand was now resting tremblingly on the sto1.

"Sir," said i1 indignantly, "why do you interfere? Why don't you let the boys wrestle? What business is it of yours?"

The old man didn't seem to understand me at first. He stared at me with the empty glint of his glasses. Then his face came to life, the grey wrinkles crawling around like malicious worms. His toothless mouth puckered wordlessly for a while. Then he mumbled: "What do you want from me?"

"I can't stand such interference. Why don't you let the youngsters fight? That's strength, that's life, that's the urge for action. But then these old men come along and always want to put things in order. It would be a shame in the world if everything was always in order. But fortunately, nobody cares about you. And I hope that the youngsters will now continue to fight in another street."

The corners of the old man's mouth pulled down and disappeared in a tangle of wrinkles. It was like a grimace of bitterness and hatred in equal measure. "Oh, you're such a bigot too," he said. And then it seemed to me as if sidi was looking out of the

The glare from the glasses was two sharp, scorching rays on me, a burning gaze strong enough to eat holes in my clothes and skin: "I remember now," he added, "you are the person who looked over my courtyard wall a few weeks ago, before I fell ill again."

So he had noticed me: welll "Jal," I said hastily, "and I think it's cruelty to animals to keep birds of prey in such cramped cages and to rejoice in all the longing and misery of their captivity." At these words, it was as if the male contracted into himself, as if shaken by a convulsion. He almost completely disappeared in his unhealthy winter coat, and the hand with the stick trembled more violently than before. But when the crouched head reappeared, a strange change seemed to have taken place in the expression of his wrinkled face. This was no longer the spiteful old man of before, this was a poor, helpless little man, worthy of pity, striving for a poor little understanding as if out of deep distress of soul. And in a sudden realisation, I realised that this man was weighed d o w n by his loneliness, that he had perhaps been carrying the burden of unspoken words for years, and that he was so far gone, confide in the first best person he met.

"I don't know," he said uncertainly, "whether you want to go with me. If you want to go with me ... I would like to tell you something. You may be surprised that I am telling you, since you are a complete stranger to me . . ."

"No, please," idi i n t e r j e c t e d , "idi think. To seduce you

stand. I'm going with you." I didn't imagine that I had a particularly trusting nature. I was sure that I **was** just the first best person to be there **at the right** moment. The old man hobbled along beside me with his unfortunate, swollen feet. "I've been ill," he wheezed, "the gout was back. That evening, you knowyes . Iwas out in a light skirt and I felt ill. This damn spring, again and again ... if only there was no spring."

We had arrived in front of his cottage. The old man led me through the unkempt front garden across a semi-dark corridor and pushed open the door to a room. It was a fairly large room with nothing in it but birdcages. A lot of birdcages, stacked from the floor almost to the ceiling. And in each cage a captive bird of prey, owls, falcons, hawks, two vultures with bare necks and in the largest of the large painted wire cages, near a window, even a mighty golden eagle. It was already dusk in this room and the birds had obviously already settled down for the night. But the moment we stepped into the room, everything started moving again. The birds began to move around on their perches, flapping wildly and restlessly and screaming fearfully and angrily. The sight of the old man seemed to awaken a common instinct of desperate defence and furious hostility in all of them at the same time. It was a shriek of the tormented creature against its tormentor. Only the eagle remained motionless, its cage was in disarray.

I was the smallest of all in relation to the size of the animal and enclosed him tightly on all sides, but I will never forget the look in the bird's eyes as the old man approached him. They were large, yellow eyes with deep black pupils, and no human eye could more clearly express such an abysmal, unrestrained look as the gaze of this captive bird of prey. All the intelligence, the wild, cool power of nature, which makes the animal a symbol of royal freedom, was transformed into hair.

The old man lifted his stick and, before I understood what he intended, drove it over the bars of all the cages that were within reach of his arm, causing the stick to rattle and jump over the wires. There was a fluttering, screeching and screeching all round, a hellish noise, which the old man answered with a grin. Then he suddenly thrust his stick between the finger-thick bars of the eagle's cage and hit the animal on the right wing. The eagle swayed a little, but immediately sat calmly on its perch again, with only the hair burning in its round yellow eyes.

"Sir," I shouted indignantly, "stop it. Why torture the animals so"

But then he threw the stick to the ground and **screeched in** his hideous old man's voice, which at that moment **had** something **bird-like about** it**: "And** life, Mr **Life?** What does life do to us? Is life different?"

A silence ensued. I didn't know what to say at the moment, because the answer that we had to be more merciful than life seemed to me to be

at that moment a little stupid. The old man, however, had crawled back into his fur, and only in the cages around him was there a quiet chattering and grumbling of the birds, which were now gradually lamenting.

Slowly, the old man lifted his head out of his fur coat and began to speak. He offered me a seat, he led me into no other room of the house, as if what was to be said could only be said here, in the midst of the cages with the captured birds of prey. And he stood before me and spoke, even when it had become so dark that he stood only as a heavy, disorganised mass in the darkness, with a last strange glow on his pale skull, reminiscent of the phosphorescence of bones. And so he had become nothing but a voice to me, a voice from the darkness.

"Yes, it's life, sir, you see, you say I torment these birds. I want to tell you something ... And me? What has life done to me? Do you think I wasn't young once9 I used to fight on the streets too. Look at me: what a miserable, sick, crooked person I am, whose limbs are crippled by the world, whose eyes need burning glasses to even get a glimpse of things. But I was once straight and healthy like you and had all the instincts of this wild woman in me. Don't be afraid that I will tell you a long life story. All life stories are constructed according to two patterns. Either according to the pattern of triumph or according to the pattern of defeat. The sum of life's energies is always the same. When it

somewhere builds a great man full of mighty forces, it draws these forces from a hundred thousand other lives and draws the sinking curves for them."

I shuddered a little, and the silence thudded against my heart. Then the old man continued in the dark, as priestly and mysterious as if he were revealing the ultimate wisdom to an adept: "You see, sir, I was young when Bismarck came up. Now - I know it: I am one of the hundreds of thousands whose lives were taken from them to give to him. Our strength flowed into him. And I was as wild and thirsty for freedom as those birds. They put me in the cage. Do you think I aspired to the martyr's crown of teaching? I wanted to be something completely different: I can no longer tell today that I dared to think about it. The freedom of life, the change of garrisons with ever-changing conditions, the medieval spirit of camaraderie, the night exercises and manoeuvres, that which in all other professions is only an obstacle to progress, the pronounced masculinity, the ideal to which all aspirations are directed. But my father was a democrat and hated soldiers, and even if his aversion had not been so great, his means would not have allowed him to grant me this career. He preached to me for hours about the noble profession of nation-builder, about the light in the future, about the spirit of freedom that is spread by the teacher. At that time, I was already sharp enough to recognise the real meaning behind these sounding phrases.

to take care of me as soon as possible, so that I wouldn't be on his back for long and could possibly support him. I ran away three times, sir, to save myself, out into the forest at night, with an old horseman's pistol and a piece of bread. I was determined. I was determined to become a robber and make my way to Ruhland. They caught me again and again and brought me back. I didn't escape my destiny to become a teacher. My father died when Idi was already standing in front of my Abc pupils. My mother, who was a beautiful woman, remarried a year after his death, this time to a man with a small fortune who didn't need to count on my support. Now I felt my wings growing again, my eyes lost their corneas and began to look round again. And then an unheard-of realisation dawned on me. I had been introduced by chance to a scholar who had now received the honourable commission to lead an expedition to Brazil at state expense. He knew my irrepressible urge to go far afield, and he suggested that I go with him as a scientific assistant, taxidermist and taxidermist, as I had practised these arts in my **free** time, and not without skill. My happiness was indescribable. We were to check in at Trieste. On the morning of our departure, I was called back by a telegram. My stepfather had died suddenly, and my mother was deserted, for it turned out that her second husband's small fortune had been lost in an accidental stock exchange transaction. The expe-

The transition went off without me, and I had to stand in front of the school desks again and play the teacher to get me and my mum through. But I can tell you that I felt this foreign life clinging to mine like a burden that pushed me back down to the ground. It was my mother's life, but I wished, Lord, that it would not last so long. During this time on the quay, I was joined by a soul with whom I found comfort. A poor girl who was full of devotion, who put up with my grumpy moods, who loved me despite my wildness. She asked for nothing, she only ever gave, and I got used to taking. After a few years, my mum died and - you'll think it's disgusting, but it's the truth: I rejoiced in my freedom. Just like when I was supposed to go to Brazil, the world was full of new paths for me. I wanted to leave my beloved without saying goodbye. But as if she had known, she, who had remained silent until now and had never made any claims, began to speak. She had not pressed me before because it had been natural for me to support my old mother, but now it was just as natural for me to make her my wife. Her many years of devotion probably deserved this thanks - and besides, she felt like a mother. I gritted my teeth when I heard the door fall into the lock with such a hard thud. But I wanted to remain an honest bloke and married her. Now my life was once again a hard one, and even life could not extinguish the certainty that somewhere there was a bright distance that would keep me alive all my life.

long called to give me freedom. I got used to all the ru8erances of marriage, but inside the longing was screaming. We had three children and sometimes I tried to persuade myself that this was the duty and purpose and fulfilment of my life. A few years ago, my wife died. And soon after, in the course of a week, my three children, all three from the same place.

stabbing illness. So that had been the purpose of my life: to give up my freedom in order to see those for whom I had given it up die. And now that all the shackles were off, now it was too late, as strong and irrepressible as my soul still was, my body had lost its vigour in the decades of struggle. I took stock of myself and r e a l i s e d with horror that I had become what you called me. A gouty, brittle old man whose eyes can only see with the sharpest of lenses . . . " .

This unstoppable accusation of life that poured out of the darkness was as eerie as a flu8 of the underworld, **filled** with broken hopes, murdered wishes, the corpses of bold thoughts. And in this icy persistence of senselessness, I wanted to defend myself, I wanted to say something in reply, to hear my own voice again and convince myself that there was something else in the world besides gloomy renunciation. I said: "I now understand why you hate youth, why you blasphemed spring."

It blew against me like a piercingly sharp wind: "Do you understand now ... Understand now

audi, why do I have the birds of prey around me? It is my revenge. The will to live, this dull primal ground of being, is always in all things, it is always the same in me, in you, in all the millions of people and all animals, and the stronger and prouder a person or animal is, the stronger the will to live is in him. I keep these strong and proud birds from me, I rob them of their freedom, just as fate has robbed me of mine. I deprive the will to live of some of its strength, and so it will be lacking in another place where it needs it, because it is only one in all things. Perhaps one day a great man will feel a strange weakness in himself and will not be able to complete an important hall, perhaps tomorrow he will be stricken with an illness and this is because these birds sit in cages and their strength is withdrawn from their will. If I were a Roman emperor, I would imprison hundreds of thousands of people, or if I were a millionaire, I would capture all the wild animals. I am a poor teacher and my vengeance reaches no further than a number of wild birds. Go now, sir, and denLen to me if a plan comes to you or if a wish does not come true."

The old man's voice had become shrill and shrill; I felt as if his eyes were glowing like animals in the darkness. The birds were beginning to become unquiet again and were squawking half-loudly and fearfully as if from bad dreams.

I groped my way to the door and out of the house through the corridor. Above me was a high, starry nadith sky, like a cathedral dome on pillars of

supported by black marble. Above the city lay a glimmer of light, a reddish cloud, woven from the contradiction of countless sources of cheerfulness and joy. As I stepped out of the front garden, the intimate embrace of two dark figures, a pair of lovers who were now walking hand in hand away from me into deeper darkness, broke away. Only at this moment did the shivers of compassion break the rigidity of my horror. I looked after the lovers: "It's in vain," I said quietly to myself, "this last attempt to be stronger than life - it's in vain."

Dos Gramophone

We had spent the evening in an Arab coffee house, my friend Andreas and I, had drunk hot coffee from the tiny bowls, smoked the nargileh and let the singers sitting on the podium in front of us envelop us with noise. We had talked about home and the strangeness of our togetherness here in Beirut. We had told each other stories, more and more frantically, the more we felt that we would ultimately have to remain silent. Because for people who have not seen each other for so long, the moment finally comes when they feel the question arise within them: 'And what has become of you in the meantime Do I still know you?' And that's when this petulant silence opens up. We were not spared it either, it loomed before us like an abyss, and we drifted straight into it.

Then we had set off and left. Now a yellow moon hung over us and penetrated the narrow canyons of the bazaar streets with its steep rays. I left myself entirely to my friend's guidance. We walked criss-cross and seemingly without direction through an endless maze. And there was always this moon above us, so that in the end I felt it weighing me down and

felt frighteningly close. There were strange shadows around us at the bottom of the street canyons. Sometimes we passed a small mosque that seemed to stand waiting with white and red striped walls. People were still chatting in front of the doors, fell silent when we came closer and looked after us. Here and there a glimmer of light fell from one of the protruding windows above us, broken and as if fragmented by the richly carved wooden lattice behind which the women were hiding.

I was dissolved, surrendered to the magic of the Orient, for 1one can escape it who has once felt it effectively.

We were walking through a street that was even narrower than the others, so narrow that even the k\ond could not penetrate its depths. Only one strip of one row of houses was illuminated, a silver border on a black cloth. Suddenly, from one of the barred windows, a strange, hideous sound, a hissing, then a scratching and a snoring. Then a voice broke out on a background of thin piano strumming:

> "Now I'm going to Maxim's. I'm very intimate there ..."

It was a crumbly comedian's voice, made even more unpleasant by the buzzing of the/V\etalls.

"Heavenly thunderstorm," I said, "a gramophone."

"Yes," Andreas confirmed, "a crammophone. A few harem girls are sitting together upstairs and enjoying European operetta melodies.

And the happy owner is envied. Incidentally, the gramophone is not so rare here. You can even find them in small cafés and sometimes even in Turkish offices."

I had a huge rage in me. Then the whole magic of the miracle night was broken, and the Grarnmophon raised its nasal snoring, its triumphant snoring and blowing in the silence of the Lleinen StraBe.

"Let the devil take European culture three times in a row and crosswise," I said.

The gramophone clicked and ran empty. I took Andreas by the arm and pulled him along more quickly, but before we had taken a few steps, it started smoking again. And then the same crumbly comedian's voice sang with the overtone of buzzing metal:

"Praise be to you, cosy night,
You made two people so happy."

A street urchin lam round the ecLe, stumbled, looked around restlessly in all directions, stuck his nose in the air, finally sat down and began to howl with his muzzle raised. "Redit you have," i1 called to him as we passed, "re "ht you have dul Oh, how do you express my feelings. Wouldn't you like to cry when you hear something like that†"

We ran into the harbour district and found ourselves safe,

"It seems you don't love the gramophone," said Andreas.

"No ... I don't love it. I could do that at the cannot be claimed with the best will in the world. Two of these so-called

I have lost my deepest memories of my most important achievements: the motor car and the gramophone. Only a later time will perhaps be able to recognise what they have destroyed in terms of our inner values. The automobile. which carves up the landscape, which severed our relationship with it, which dominates the roads and throws clouds of dust and stink bombs of petrol at pedestrians. And the gramophone: do you know how such a piece in the gramophone seems to me9 Like a galvanised mummy that suddenly starts to twitch, straightens up and begins a dance with a small semblance of life. The gramophone flatters all mob instincts, it gives the vulgar a frenzied dissemination and it drags down everything that is coarse and addictive. The gramophone is the main instrument of general levelling. Our culture will soon look like Mars. No more highs and lows, everything flat and levelled. If the master cobbler Pifke buys a gramophone disc with a song by some famous singer, then the famous singer has to s i n g for the " master cobbler PifLe. And Lein Mensch is outraged by this lack of style, this rape. Art wants its frame. The most divine anti-establishment in the middle of the Lüneburg Heath would seem like nonsense. Why? Because the frame is missing. The Grammoplion, however, either gives the most heinous barbarities from the outset, or it wants to convey art - without a frame. WeI1 hair-raising nonsense. The gramophone is the worst enemy of culture."

Idi was furious and would have been prepared to

to continue against the instrument that had brought midz out of the blissful dream mood earlier, but Andreas now put his hand on my arm and said: "Calm down ... It's no use, you won't stop the course of events. And by the way, you're also doing the gramophone an injustice ... I can't quite agree with you. Like every thing, the gramophone has two sides."

"However, this is a deep and completely new philosophy. Quite astonishingly deep. But you are also sitting here in the Orient ... at the ancient sources of all wisdom."

"I think that even this soulless instrument can become significant for us ... through its memorising values. And if I really wanted to do a bit of philosophy, I would say that the gramophone is the projection of our memory into the outside world, its mechanisation."

"Sapperment . . .I"

Yes - the gramophone can also receive a soul from us, a piece of our life, *which it preserves for us ... I want to tell you a story. It also contains the explanation as to why I disappeared from your sight so suddenly five years ago. Let's sit down here outside for a while."

We were standing on the Molo, which stretched out from the shore like a stone arm into the harbour and seemed to reach out as if to protect us from the ships. The city lay very still, only the dogs barked and howled in the streets. The sea was silver and smooth like the pieces of tinfoil on the Christmas cots in my hometown. Black and heavy

the ships staggered in the tide, and just in front of us was an old wreck that was as dark as a hole in the glistening sea. Over there, however, Lebanon shimmered with its snowy back like a palace of the ancient Phoenician moon gods. Andreas sat down on a block of wood. "You'll have guessed that there's a woman in my story," he began.

"I don't know of any stories involving Lelne Frauan."

Good. But you will refrain from telling me her name. Maybe you'll guess it yourself ... let's call her Christal"

"Agreed."

"My story begins with the fact that we played together as children ..."

"These are always the most rûring conversations that start like this," said idi.

But Andreas continued calmly: "It is also not impossible that the story had a similar continuation as in other such cases. Perhaps we were chosen for each other by our parents at an early stage. In any case, we weren't told because they wanted us to find out for ourselves. My father probably didn't want to rob us of the shame of poetry. In short, we betrayed each other as brother and sister for a long time. Then the first separation. I went to university in Prague. The young people who were kept at home in overly careful care are in great danger when they finally have to stand on their own two feet. I drove over into the wilderness. You know for yourself what a great job I did.

I was so exuberant that I didn't know what to do. It went on like that for a while in dulci jubilo. Until the setback came and I felt that the moment of decision was approaching. Now I had to turn my life either to the abyss or to solid, safe land.

I gave myself a jolt and drove home. I arrived almost sick, my soul was filled to the brim with disgust; I don't think there was anyone in the world I would have despised as much as me.

You will also remember that my life changed from a certain point in the tent. That was after my return from home. Christa had become - as they say - an angel to my rescue. That's a phrase, but no one can judge what it means. than someone for whom it has become a shining truth. Christa cleansed me. I shuddered at the waste of my time and the hustle and bustle that lay behind me. Christa excused it with the supreme p o w e r of youth in me.

On the first evening after my return home, we all sat together in our music room. Christa sang. One song by Schubert, two by Brahms, one by Hugo Wolf. I had never realised that pure sound could make me so happy. I was enchanted. And that's also when I learnt that happiness makes you good and healthy. My recovery began that evening.

"Where did you learn to sing like that?" I asked Christa trembling as we stood closer together in a window alcove.

'Oh, it's nothing,' she said, 'I feel it's t34

much more in me. If I had the right teacher, he could probably get it out of me. But old Fischerl My God, a good old gentleman, but not the right teacher.

Christa took her singing lessons very seriously, and no temptation could tempt her away from her daily exercises. 'I want to be a great singer,' she once said. I thought that was a girl's wish. All girls have strange desires at some time. At least I learnt from her example how you have to organise your life according to a goal. When I came back to Prague, my goal stood before me. Christa was that goal.

After half a year of hard labour, I saw home again. Christa had become even more beautiful and blooming. 'You know,' said her father, whom I called uncle, after greeting her, 'our Christa is supposed to go on stage.

I looked at Christa. There was a sparkle in her eyes, a barely contained joy, a shimmering happiness. 'Is it true,' my gaze asked. She answered no.

They had been 'discovered'. At a performance of the 'Creation' was heard by the influential music critic of a major Viennese newspaper. He was very agitated and had stormed her parents: it would be a crime to deprive this voice of art. He wanted to do everything he could to pave the way for her.

And in just a fortnight's time, Christa was due to return to
Vienna.

I wasn't very happy with this turn of events. I felt as if Christa was about to slip away from me. I knew enough about these things to tell myself that the stage is a juggernaut that has its

devouring the victim with skin and hair. Now it was a race for my happiness. I had to reach my destination before Christa had completely succumbed to the /Vtoloch. I returned to Prague earlier than I had intended and before Christa had left for Vienna.

That was when I changed my profession. Progress in law was too slow. I turned to commercial science. It was easier to get a good position where I could offer Christa everything she wanted. I forged ahead with undaunted determination. I knew that Christa had gone to Paris after finishing her studies in Vienna. There was more than one bad night in which I had to imagine her again and again, in the middle of the immense city - young, beautiful, hot, enchanting through her art, as desirable as a woman can be. We wrote to each other. She told me about her studies, about her teacher, about the opera, about concerts. What should I say to her? Should I put my sphere of work and sweat in front of her eyes? Should I tell her that I, angry, furious, clenching my teeth, was out to snatch her away from the glittering world of her art?

After two years, I was ready. I was ready.
I have been trying to secure a position in a large bank.

I went home with my employment decree. From Christa's last letter I knew that her studies in Paris were finished and that she wanted to return to her parents in the next few days. Then I hadn't heard anything else, because

My struggle for the position at the bank had taken all my strength.

But I went home with the unmistakable feeling that I was going to start Christa. If life had any meaning, if it was even remotely comparable to a work of art, the decision had to be made now.

However, the decision was made. But not the way I had raised it. I didn't meet Christa at home. Her parents weren't there either. They had travelled to Vienna to attend the first concert in which Christa was performing.

My parents were very offended that I left them again so soon after such a long absence. But I think I would have run away from my father's deathbed to see Christa and hear her sing.

The hall was overcrowded. Did all these people already know about Christa's artistry? I had only got one of the last seats. In the midst of this crowd, I became a little timid. Was it possible that I had come to take away from all these people the artist to whom they laid claim?

Christa stepped onto the podium and sang. The sounds harmonised with the flashing of the stones around her neck and the shimmer of her skin. A wondrous feeling of happiness came over me again and drowned out the fear that was deep inside me. This much I knew: Chrlsta's art was by the grace of God.

The audience was 8u8er sldi with delight. It raved and screamed. It demanded more, more and more, and Christa managed to get a few more cheers with a slight bow and a small victorious smile.

gave. Their success was decided.)fir Xame was one of the first in the realm of the art of singing.

Afterwards, I didn't speak to her either. I don't know how I got into the artists' room. I must have fought with my fists and elbows. She looked at me for a moment, then she shook my hand, 'A1, Andreas, that's nice, that you came to my concert too'.

'You have ... you have achieved a great success,' I stammered, 'and - there are ... there were a lot of people here.

'Yes - my manager has done a marvellous job with his Sadie. A gentleman approached us. 'And you too, of course, you also have your share in my victory. Your letter spoke of my fame before I even had it.

She introduced me to the gentleman. It was the one and only music critic who had discovered Christa's voice.

I looked into her eyes until she turned away. But not soon enough for me not to have seen that the experience was in them, the knowledge, the feminisation.

I spent the whole night in her company. It must have been great fun. When I remember that night, I can still hear laughter and the clinking of glasses. But it's just like a light murmur and I haven't remembered a single thing about it.

I left the next morning. Christa started her triumphal procession on the same day.

For three years, her star rose ever higher.

Her successes were tremendous; it was a glare and radiance like that of Bençal suns. She prostrated all the rulers before her. The whole world was full of her. She soon left the concert hall and turned her attention to the stage. The newspapers brought anecdotes about her life and interviews, they spoke of her artistic personality in long feature articles.

I followed her career. An office for newspaper clippings sent me everything that was written about her. I have a whole 8book full of such clippings at home. You'll find everything carefully pasted in there, from the reviews of her first appearance to those last few messages.

It began when it was reported that the artist had been struggling with a visible indisposition during yesterday's performance of 'Lohengrin'. A few weeks later it was said that she had taken an extended holiday for health reasons.

I was also overworked at the time and had retired to a small Istrian spa to relax.

Here I held mi1 completely still and surrendered to doing nothing without reservation, gazing up at the blue sky and the silky-soft, caressing sea.

One evening I went up to the hill next to the small chapel of San Lorenzo. A steep cliff juts out from the coastal cliffs and drops vertically into the sea. When I got to the top, I saw the cliff that usually belonged to me occupied by a woman in a white summer dress. She turned round - it was Christa.

Without betraying any particular surprise, she nodded to me. 'God bless, Andreas,' she said.

Idi Lein could speak a word.

'You think I've changed a lot,' she asked. And that was a sad truth, because her eyes looked tired and lacklustre, her nose had become more pointed and her mouth sometimes twitched with a wispy smile. She looked like a woman who had experienced a great sorrow and still felt it like a cloud over her. This was not how I had imagined her, the radiant winner, the royal singer.

I felt that I would not stand up to her with common consolations or excuses and said what I was thinking.

She nodded her head. 'Yes,' she said, 'it came over me. Perhaps I took on too much and should have been wiser. But it's such a wild and wonderful life in the theatre, it takes us away. You don't think about the fact that you have such a delicate instrument inside you. A voice -' she paused when she realised my horror. 'Oh well,' she continued quietly and with a lowered gaze, 'perhaps you don't know anything about it yet. The newspapers were so careful not to report anything about it.

'Christa,' I said and grabbed her hand, 'Christa ... your voice ... she ... I know nothing …'

'Maybe Idi shouldn't have gone on stage. Maybe my voice wasn't up to the demands of the stage. She took her hand from me, propped it on the boulder and stood up.

'But nothing has been decided yet. All is not yet lost. Things can still get better. And it is

It was also more the fear that brought me down like this ... the fear, Andreas, just the fear.

She stood up and looked out over the sea, which seemed to be rising rosy under an opal-coloured sky at its edge. Deep below us on the cliffs there was a soft murmur.

'But tomorrow the fear will come to an end,' Christa said to herself, 'tomorrow it will be decided. Tomorrow, Andreas, Professor Forster, the larynx specialist, is coming, you know, he will make the decision ...'

She had spoken so calmly that I was startled when she suddenly threw herself round and clutched me with both arms. It was a cry from the depths of despair: 'Andreas, Andreas, if I can't sing anymore - then ... then it's all over ...'

What should I say? How could I comfort her? For a moment the thought crossed my mind that I should speak of how I had loved her and that I still loved her. But how could she comfort my love over the loss of her art Should she, perhaps having to leave the table of the rich, take a seat at a beggar's table?

We walked together down the steep, stony path from the cliff to the beach. The stones rolled away under our feet and fell over the edge of the cliff into the darkness of the falling night. We didn't speak a word.

Along the beach road lay the shimmering white villas in their gardens of @l trees, pla!anes and pines. Lights flashed here and there. One of the

Yillen shone out of all the windows. And with the lidit, the noise of a large party penetrated the night. Just as we passed by, the house became quieter and then a grarnmophone began to play a few unison°n piano chords.

A voice rose. It was the nocturnal, sweet, bridal song of Elsa: 'To you airs that so sadly often fill my throat …'

Christa had stopped and jerked me back.

It was her voice that sounded from the gramophone inside, Christa's sweet, bridal, wondrous voice. It rose up brightly, spread out wise wings and hovered in the air like a bird, victorious, overcoming, detached from all heaviness. It was this voice that I knew, that had carried away my happiness, this beloved enemy in all her enchanting beauty. And I forgot that she was made of a miserable Lam toy, a soulless /Y\e1anism, and all imperfection was left far, far behind.

The play was over and the guests inside the white house clapped their hands.

'That was me, Andreas,' said Christa, 'that was me. And then she lay crying in my neck again. 'When it's over, Andreas ... when it's over ... my art was my justification for everything I ... have forgotten ... it was my happiness ... it is my essence ... when it's over, Andreasl'

Idi kissed her and pushed her damp hair out of her forehead. Then I accompanied her to her hotel. But I stood outside her windows for half the night.

I shouldn't have gone home at all, dear friend, but watched over her.

The next day brought the decision. It was announced that Professor Forster had had to make the sad announcement to the esteemed artist that her voice was gone forever.

Two hours later she was found at the foot of the cliff of San Lorenzo between the large boulders. The surf was playing with her white summer dress.

I left Europe soon afterwards."

Andreas was silent. The moon had sunk lower and blue shadows lay on the white ice palace of the Phoenician Astarte. Carefully, a boat with rippling oars pushed out between the anchored ships on the glittering surface of the water.

Andreas slowly stood up. "You're not going to for a person without any culture," he said, "if you visit me and find a gramophone in my house . . ."

HerrChef

One morning, the usher Jahoda was hanging by a rope from the door hinge and was dead.

There was a whole host of fishing rods in the huge court building. But the usher Jahoda hadn't made do with just any t'iirangel, somewhere in the shadows, but had chosen a very special one. One of the door hinges around which the inner door of the board office revolved.

So now he was hanging on the door that so many tentative fingers had already knocked on, very blue in the face and very dead. His legs were lying on the wide carpet that led from the desk of the head office to the door and were bent inwards.

This is how the temporary servant Kopral found him when he came into the board office shortly after seven o'clock to heat up. Kopral was alone with the hanged man, and someone else might have run away. But the copral was a veteran soldier and took his knife and cut off his colleague, thinking that he would soon become a real officer. And then he thought that it was a worthy joke that Jahoda had just hanged himself in the boardroom.

One by one, the Amtstroglodytes arrived. Of course, there was a big fuss. Nobody sat down at their desks. They gathered together and savoured the delights of the shared horror. Whole shows came over from the departments with the most beradi to have their share of the sensation.

Shortly before eight o'clock, the police also arrived to record the offence, and then Jahoda was taken away on a covered stretcher.

Groups stood around the place where he had been lying, discussing the motives for the crime.

"He has defrauded money from the official budget," said the Auditor General MatzLa, "if someone needs more than he earns, he can only hang himself."

"It's not just that," replied the clerk Scñnabl, "the poor devil ... he was supposed to be transferred, the old man requested it ... and he was so completely over it ..."

Well ... He did have the flat in kind up there and then the trin1geld on the first day when he brought the salary, that would all have been cancelled . . ."

"Has anyone been over to his wife's flat yet?" asked the old, fat officer farmer, whose waistcoat reflected the morning light.

No, no one had been down there yet. Who would want to be the head of such a nightmare?

"By the way, he was a real draughtsman," said the adjunct Prosper, "he was in the pub every night last week. He has also

see the old man eïniział in an unpleasant position.

He shrugged his shoulders: "Yes . . I y'eíB nidit, .Mr DireLtor."

"At any rate, people are talking about the poems; what do they say?"

The official gave a long definition: "Yes ... Mr Board ... people, they just talk around like that . . ."

"Tell me what? Just say it."

"His money affairs ... and because of its setting."

"It's not my fault. Everyone is always to blame for stories like this. There's nothing else I can do. So let me deal with it. After all, you brought it all to my attention. Now you have to take some of the responsibility."

The official backed away in dismay and put his hand on his left breast pocket in protest.

"The presidency is also behaving very strangely," the board continued, "you have to say that. First you always have to be firm and snowy ... and then if you're firm and snowy ... and something happens, they leave you in the dust. I was on the phone to the court counsellor just now and he said, yes, my dear, you shouldn't have hit me with both fists like that. That's what you get for it."

So that was a new nuance, this unpleasantness of the presidency. Schnabl looked at his boss with cold eyes. This was the look of the people whose ship

began to sink. Schnabl decided to save sídi at the same time.

The director struggled to lift his fiercely lowered cheeks and put the chewed cigar in his mouth. He chewed again without realising that the bundle of damp leaves had long since been extinguished.

The officer S1nabl cleared his throat. How much longer was he going to stand here? This clearing of the throat showed the officer very energetically that he wanted to be dismissed.

"Are you still there?" asked Mr Eberl ... "So ... Is there no doubt that it was **really** Mr Jahoda who attacked the official lump sum ...

coul dn't it have been anyone else?"

"So ... it's not rumoured that it must have been Jahoda." Then the headmaster banged his fist on the desk: "And I'm telling you, it was Jahoda and no one else. And he can still be glad that we only transferred him and didn't do anything else."

Åls the Ofhzíal was outside, the director continued his thoughts.

It was quite unquestionable that the deceased had put a grill in the Åmtsgelder. Who else could it have been? And hadn't Sdinabl always told us about Jahoda that he needed a lot of money, that he travelled around the inns, that he was even deprived of a position of trust in the servants' association because of his constant need for money?

The headmaster looked up, startled. There was a loud noise outside his office. A siren screeched so loudly that it could be heard through the

I could hear it twice. A confusion of men's voices mingled with the screeching, someone was banging on the outer door, a fight seemed to be taking place. Now the board realised that Jehoda's wife had been thrown in.

He jumped up, ran to the door and turned the S&key in the Sdilo8; then, as if this were still nilt security enough for him, he leaned his heavy body with his back against the panel. He heard the woman outside being dragged away. He heard her screech: "The dog ... the dog . !" Then it became quiet. The furious woman had been overpowered. Breathing heavily, as if after surviving danger, the director leaned against the door.

. . At twelve o'clock, the Executive Board was called to the Presidium by telephone.

He walked down the corridor like a condemned man. His subordinates looked after him and wished him ill. They all knew that the court counsellor was very angry, because he was not a fan of newspapers being given the opportunity to deal with events in the office.

The newspapers really did attack the assistant director like hyenas. He had few friends in the democratic papers. They ran big articles about black-yellow Caesar madness, about official misbehaviour and disciplinary arbitrariness.

When even the Christian "Volksstimme" joined the chorus, the reviewer Matzka said: "Now I don't want to be in Eberl's place. The 'Volksstimme' is the

Mrs Katharina's favourite newspaper. The old woman swears by what she says. The Eberl can be happy."

Everyone knew Mrs Katharina, the director's housekeeper. She was the secret regent, the despot of the despot, her mood made the good and bad weather at the office. The idea of how things were going for the director at home gave his subordinates new values in life.

"Just look at him, the way he comes along," said Official Schnabl, who had become one of the cheekiest mockers, "as if the chickens had taken his bread." And the temporary servant Kopral came back from the board office every day with the same amused grin. The director had had another craving for a fork breakfast today.

It was certainly a bad time for Roderich Eberl. Mrs Katharina treated him like a leper: He had to eat his meals in the kitchen and was served up with nothing but a barrage of reproaches and insults.

One day, an unusual scene occurred. When the board came out of the office at two o'clock. Mrs Jahoda attacked him in front of the gate of the court building, screaming and raving with clenched fists and finally spitting in his face in front of a large crowd of onlookers. Eberl was careful not to tell anyone at home about the attack.

But Mrs Katharina knew the very next day. "They'll retire you ... with shame and dishonour," she railed.

"I'm going to ask for a holiday," said the director very meekly, "I can't take it any longer.

from ... always sit in the office where the person hanged himself."

That you don't dare to take a holiday. Not right now. Then they'll say it's your fault."

Eberl did not dare to reply, but this only fuelled the fury of the fight. There was a battle that lasted until the evening and which Mrs Katharina ended by throwing the board of directors out of his own apartment. She was not to see him again today.

Roderi1 Eberl walked slowly through the streets. He had his hat pulled into his eyes and was holding on to the walls of the houses. He felt as if everyone could see how humiliated and degraded he was. He didn't want to meet any officials, because their reason seemed so hesitant and superior to him that he preferred to avoid them altogether. His conscience - what conscience? He had only done his duty, and this appalling feeling of helplessness was nothing but a heavy fatigue after so many sleepless nights and so much excitement. He avoided the great brightness of the shop windows, not wanting to be overwhelmed by the glare. "I think that's a nasty thing to do," said someone behind him. The director cringed and looked round. Two unknown gentlemen were walking along the street. He had overheard a piece of a conversation that was none of his business. Panting, he walked on.

Suddenly his eyes were drawn upwards.

A few steps, a familiar gate invited him in. He stood in front of the courthouse. It was late

and the director realised how cold this winter night was. He couldn't stay on the street all night, and he couldn't stay in a hotel either. Then tomorrow the whole town would be up in arms about the fact that he had been thrown out by Mrs Katharina.

Then he put his hand up to the bell and pressed the button. The porter was not at all surprised when he saw the assistant manager Eberl in front of the door.

"I have so **much** to do," said the board member, „ich has to do a bit of a night shift today ... otherwise I won't be able to come in right away ... Just leave me the second key so that I don't have to wait for you. . ."

He would certainly have had enough to do if he had wanted to. He had been unable to work for two weeks. The files on his desk were jumbled up and over each other, a jumble in which nobody could find their way around.

The warden took off his winter coat and turned on the lever of the large, continuous-burning stove. There was an uncertain light in the room, a lost glow from the windows of the house opposite.

"You have to light the lamp," the headmaster said half aloud to si1. "Where thecopral may have put it... aha, up there on the.. well, you rarely need it ... but he could wipe them off sometimes ... there's dust finger-high on it ... such sloppiness . . ."

And he went on and on, spouting irrelevant stuff, meaningless words that eventually lost all meaning and context, while he placed the lamp on the desk and lit it. Suddenly, he sat up and staggered back. He felt as if a shadow was slowly moving away from the door and coming towards him. A quick glance showed him how wrong he had been. There was a shadow on the door, but it was the shadow of the lamp itself, and it did not move from the spot.

"How nervous I've become, how nervous I am," muttered the director. After all, the pain wouldn't leave his limbs, no matter how sensibly he talked to himself, and he kept having to look at the door, at that fatal shadow that lay just where Jahoda had been hanging. Eberl wanted to work a little longer now, until the sleep lam, and then he wanted to lie down on the leather sofa. It would be a bit uncomfortable, but it was a substitute for the bed.

He began to try and organise the chaos of the alts, shuffling the pieces back and forth and separating the important from the unimportant. Then he was suddenly plunged back into the ice-cold flood of horror. He had heard a footstep in the anteroom outside ... very clearly ... a footstep approaching his office. Who had something to do up here in the middle of the night? With two jumps, the director was at the door and turned the key, just like when Mrs Jahoda had tried to attack him.

He removed the key and placed it on the desk. Then he sat back in his armchair and

felt the 1old sweat on his forehead. It had become quiet outside.

h\an could try to work again. Yes. it looked really great here, and it wasn't that easy to sort out the confusion.

There was a noise up the director's gate. A noise at the door ... He stood up, pushed back his chair, stared ... He felt as if the door was being moved. Something was at the door. And now

- Now it had entered, although he had not opened the door, it was in the room and filled it with its terrifying presence. The director's whole body trembled, his prudence plunged into the abyss of horror.

It was unbearable ... It was completely impossible to spend the night here. One would have to go mad if one's senses had become so excited ... Just get away, just get out, rather walk around outside through the night than stay here.

The headmaster was looking for the Sdil bowl, he had put it here next to the ashtray ... but now it wasn't here ... Where had it gone? It had to be here. Maybe it was somewhere under the files ... You just had to search thoroughly. And the director rummaged through the files, which had only been organised a little at first, threw them to the floor, swept them over the table top with his arm and searched for the key like a desperate man.

He was gone ... he was nowhere to be found. And the terrible presence of a horror became ever clearer, filling the whole room, taking possession of the defenceless man, penetrating through all

Pores pulled into his body and his legs trembled madite. The key was gone ... and the board Lonnte could not escape the horror, he was locked in here for a whole night, alone with the horror, at the mercy of an enemy, an unspeakable, malicious madite.

The headmaster ran to the Tgr and started banging on it with both fists. "Open up," he shouted, "open up..." And he blindly and madly pounded away so that the door shook. But who would hear him? The porter lived on the ground floor, and he was here on the third floor of the spacious building. There was no hope of rescue before tomorrow morning.

But the key ... the key had to be found. Once again, the board rummaged through the albums so that the loose sheets fluttered across the table. He lit up and whimpered in fear. The key ... the key ...

There ... there ... there was something under this thick nude, right in the corner ...

He picked up the large parcel ... It was a rope that lay underneath. The same rope with which Jahoda had hanged himself and which had then been thrown onto the desk and covered by the files ...

In the morning, the director of the auxiliary office, Eberl, was found hanged in his office. He was hanging in the same place as Jahoda and by the same rope on the same door hinge.

Kopral cut him off, just as he had cut off Jahoda two weeks earlier.

"You see," said the revId-nt revId-nt Matz1a to the adjunct Prosper, "the duplicity of the cases
There you go again, what did I say? But I wouldn't have imagined that Eberl himself would be the second."

Bastiana,FräuJeinBastiana,desWir(enszum "Reichs-adler" Pflegetoditer, a fundamentally learned house, a marvel for her seculum and the Duchy of Jägerndorf, Latin, Greek, peoples, Vîecher, herbs in a(ler world, astronomy, rhetoric and music and a bit of all the other liberal arts. Not a blue-stockinged, bespectacled scholar, but a Silesian Diana, with dogs barking, riding and shooting, so proud of her belt, of course, a man's horror and an abomination to all squatters and vapour-seekers.

She has to experience this when the friend of her heart allows herself to be caught and walks into the marriage cage beaming with joy, Angela, daughter of the merchant Jonas, with some grocer from Troppau. At the wedding, the mood was miserable, no wonder when her best friend, educated and advised for better things, suddenly reveals a long-lost bridegroom, reveals the certain promise that she intends to become a wife and mother.

No spiced wine washed away the bitter feeling of betrayal. Bastiana threw remarks around as if she were standing up, they were hitting people in the fur and clinging to them. The others laughed at the

burdocking of their companions and ducked down,

to be trodden on himself. The young husband wandered along in a particularly well-adorned manner, marvelling that people were making such pleasant faces at him, and that wherever he stood there were children around him.

The town clerk Christian Bãr also fared quite badly. He had been so careless as to half-disclose a long-hidden affection in a poem that he tried to slip under Bastiane's plate on their third wedding anniversary. He considered himself a connoisseur of women and assumed that Bastiane's prickliness was just a poorly concealed longing for his own bride. The poem claimed that the maiden was Diana and /¥\inerva at the same time and, with reference to her somewhat dark birth, that she had rudely sprung from Zeus' house; it appealed to the connoisseur of the fine arts with its well-crafted one hundred and fifty learned and mythological turns of phrase. Bastíana turned the poem into a trumpet reed and blew into the author's ear that his verses had probably learnt to dance with one of his foes, as they would have done in the annual marches. This made Mr Christian Bär's gall apple juice boil and he plotted revenge. On the evening of the fifth day of the wedding, on the vigil of St Martin's Day 1528, the young married couple left the table and the dancing. The bride's mother put up the tower of hair, tinsel, lace, holy pictures and pieces of glass that the young woman had been wearing on her head for more than a hundred hours. The young husband stamped impatiently on the threshold.

Tears of butter dribbled down the stiffly rimmed neckline of Toditer. With her eyes wide open and her hands trembling at the urging of her admonishing husband, the old woman pushed at the round hand mirror. There was a loud, late clink and glass clattered. "Seven years of misfortune," mumbled Mrs Jonas, blanching.

Angela bent over the glass door, saw a single eye, unnaturally large, lying on the floor, she forced a cheerful laugh out of herself: "No, dierben means luck."

They toddled down the stairs together, Bastiana slipped out of a door behind which the wedding merriment raged on, embraced the woman and whispered into the jewellery dangling from her right ear: "Never forget yourself, don't let him get the upper hand"

Three \\cars stood in front of the gate. On the first were half a dozen wedding guests from Troppau, who were happy to welcome the couple without any fuss and wanted to go home with them. The second carriage was packed with wedding paraphernalia: cupboards, chests, piled up drawers, white linen, citrine crockery and tubs, all the things a young household needs, a handsome trousseau. The young married couple were sitting on the third vehicle, the lutcher in front of them was slouching, his ears were laid back, stars were twinkling high above.

In the courtyard gate stood the merchant Jonas, his weeping wife, Bastiana with a waving scarf and a bird trill for Angela: "See you again".

Half of them were drunk and the other half not sober, they were thrown together as they put on their horses, grunted happily and drank the last jug they had taken with them for refreshments. The loaded bridal carriage rumbled heavily, in the third carriage a hand waved goodbye, the night watchman Lam rounded the corner with his mirror and lantern, and seeing a respectable, bourgeois spectacle, he paid his respects.

Bastiana, Miss Bastiana, raised her train and returned to the wedding party. A dance had just finished, and the town clerk Christian Bgr was standing on a bench, holding a small doll in each hand, a male and a female, who he had speak to each other alternately in high and low voices.

It was a very erudite puppet mongering, throwing around Latin and Greek and claiming that women were equal to men in all respects, even superior to them in some, and would soon outstrip them.

The Lord spoke back in all due honour, saying that God would know why he had made a difference and that at least courage was reserved for the men.

But the bold puppet would not accept this, saying that courage was not given to men alone, and that there were women's rooms that were not inferior to theirs. Suddenly, however, it shouted "Jhil", squeaked "a mouse a mouse", hopped through the air and hurried into the town clerk's right pocket.

This exit was greeted by great laughter, the

Men nodded to each other with superiority and satisfaction, the women snuggled up to their life supports, and those who had no1 8astiana's burrs in their fur shook them off. The city director 1rode off the bench, acclaimed, with a satisfied feeling of revenge. But there stood Bastiana before him, menacingly beautiful, undressed, flashing with anger, so that the scanty man's heart wound began to bleed again,

I want you to put my courage to the test. Immediately, if it pleases you"

They were full of wine, shouted enthusiastically, agreed; the men felt very important when Bastian8 descended from her aloofness; the women wanted little for their comrade, who was striving to get out of the henhouse, and hoped that she would be humiliated by the first mouse.

Eir'e kind of consultation with a lot of shouting was held.

"She should go to the Schellenburg now, right now, immediately, in the Nadit."

She should bring a bunch of rowan trees from there."

"From the tree that stands by the black tower."

It stayed that way. The landlord of the "Reichsadler" chuckled fearfully at the little stage girl: "You're not going to leave."

"You won't deny me that," she said, and he complied. accustomed to obeying for years, worried and tormented by remorse that he had not reined in his unbridled pride.

Rasdi had swapped her long-sleeved wedding dress for a lumiskirt. With free, springy feet, a man-proof dagger in her belt, she walked under a yellow, sinking
/ńond through the garden. A shadow limped out of the gate towards her: "Let me show you round, Miss"

"What can you think of, Mr Stedtschreíberl, so that you can say afterwards that I wouldn't have dared to do it alone2"

"So I want to tell you that there are many rowan trees along the road."

"I swear to you by the Virgin Mary and all the saints that the rowan trees I will bring you will not have been plucked from any other tree than the one by the black tower of the Schellenburg." Still full of anger, she stretched out her steps and shortened her path along the white road, streaked black with tree shadows. She was already rustling in the autumn-dry bushes of the castle hill, digging with her feet in the musty leaf litter. She had missed the right way up, bravely slid her way through the vines and crushed herself on the broken edges of exposed rocks. As she did so, she clenched her teeth like a boy. The moon crept down behind the mountain on the other side, it was hellishly dark, and she really could have thought of a lantern. Once there were sparks, but they flew from her eyes because a tree trunk was darker than her forehead. She stepped on a long stump that had fallen from her skirt and fell down. There was no way to miss the path, further up the hill, then you had to go to the ghost's nest.

come. They realised, in the middle of a battle with brambles, that they must be very frightening ghosts to bar the entrance like that. The three-headed, glowing dog and the howler were not enough for them; in the end, they liked it so much in the old walls that they didn't want to be released.

Finally, the steep slope curved into a gentle crest, forest and undergrowth stopped at the edge of a clearing. It lay like a tonsure on the top of the mountain, and the pile of masonry was plonked in the middle of it. A bump swelled on Bastiana's forehead, she drew the dagger and pressed the long blade across it.

Under the straight side of the wall, darkness swelled into a thick channel. A lump of darkness moved from right to left. away from the forest towards the wall. It was someone walking there, bent over under a sack. Blackness swallowed him up. Day-shy thieves were about to spoil the robbery of the berry bushes, the low moon framed the patchy, crumbling battlements of the black tower.

She clambered over boulders to the little tree that was splitting a ledge with its roots. A red slit suddenly appeared, Bastiana's hand flashed with firelight, and she was immediately curious to get to the bottom of the gallows. Bastiana told them to take a look. Here the slit was only narrow, further down it was wider, Bastiana was lying on the building, her head hanging forwards, looking into a vaulted hiding place. Smoke rose swirling, stinging her

Eyes blind, someone had shoved new food into the fire's mouth. Now flames were roaring through, burning brightly, consuming the smoke. The cursed adventurer forced her eyelids apart, there were twenty or however many murderers sitting there, had opened chests and shops, were rummaging in boxes, had pulled out clothes and linen, were weighing dirt in their paws and were all shouting together as if the gallows had been set up for honest people. Her fingers tightened, her teeth grew long and sharp, her skin lay over her face like a damp rag. A black guy danced around in a woman's shirt that he had pulled over his smock, another squeezed women's stockings onto his dirty tuberous feet. They laughed and jeered, snatched things out of each other's hands, threw them at each other, waved pieces of laundry like flags. Only one remained silent, he stood with his legs bent, his right hands over against the wall, his fingers touching the clay floor, his bare feet turned inwards with the tips, the soles facing upwards, raw and bloody like minced meat. And he would probably have fallen down long ago if his neck had not been carefully tied to an iron ring in the wall with a cord. It was not easy to recognise that it was the young guest of Angela, because his mouth had been cut open with a knife on both sides up to his ears, so that he could not be seen. he grinned and showed the whole of his face.

Whimpering crept out of the hole. It came from just below Bast!ana, where her eyes were not under the walls.

reached out. She slid round and saw the other half. Angela was standing there, naked, stretched against the wall with ropes, her arms raised to the shape of a cross, with tufts of blonde hair curled up under her arms. Deep red welts ran down her chest, belly and legs, blue marks stained her body, a vile violence of oestrus had marked it. In front of her, in the doorway, crouched one, full and empty, tickling her with a long feather under her arms and on her torn, bloody sho8. Angela whimpered, moaned, writhed in tickling agony and occasionally screamed a terrible cry of despair. The guy in the shirt danced in front of her, spreading the linen daintily to the left and right of his body and scratching violently with his feet.

One of them said: "Make an endel We can't drag her with us I" Bastiana looked him in the face. She knew it from the pictures of the anniversaries, where his deeds were sung about in a creepy way.

She got up on her knees, picked up a heavy stone, put it down **silently** and stood up with trembling legs. "I'm going," she said. She slipped over the rubble under the tower, then ran across the clearing. At the edge of the forest, she runs round.

You won't believe itl Ici must have the signl Ran back, in a dreamy confusion, Lliterated night-walking over the rubble to the little tree and stretched out, pulling a strong branch down towards her. Beneath her, in the vaulted hideaway, the gang raged, arguing loudly. A tuft of berries with leafy plumage snapped, the robbed branch snapped back, a small stone rolled away underneath Bostiana's foot, landed on the ground

in the gerö1I, rlB em 1IeInes rumbling Ceriesel with siói and through the gap into the robbers' vault hInab.

A pebble hit Hunzaches on the shoulder. He raised his head and saw belt dust, chunks of brick and sand coming down through the crack in the ceiling.

What's that?" he shouted.

Bastiana heard a terrible voice and immediately all the noise below was swallowed up by the walls. Bastiana descended with living soles, the crunching of the sand was a thunderous roar throughout the castle. Now she didn't take the path across the alleyway, but along the wall, through the scrub of the moat, under mockingly leaning noses and bay windows. At one point, a stone grimace suddenly grinned in her face, and in an abruptly opened arched doorway she saw a blood-red moon horn low above the edge of the forest. All at once she thought of the white, soft bed, of the pleasurably cosy creaking of the drawer when she turned to the side, of the row of gold-embossed book spines on the wall that shimmered dully in the moonlight. Her feet came up against dry, rain-bleached wood that lay in her path like graveyard bones scraped from the earth. At the back, searching lanterns shone across the clearing. Hunzadies was an exceptionally famous Robber chief.

He was born in Hungary, where not only the best horses and pigs **come from,** but also the most favoured robbers. **The** entire Ba1ony forest was proud of him, and seven villages fought over the honour of his birth. A black moustache, twisted together with pitch, stood horizontally in his face.

two points under his nose, his eyes burned a black fire, he wore a waistcoat of human hair, a count of the realm had had to give his skin for his money-cat, and when he was in a **mood** he played the violin so marvellously that all the robbers had to weep.

Life was hard, was his favourite saying; and because he had a good heart, he helped many of his fellow human beings from this burdensome burden. But if anyone didn't realise this straight away and preferred to carry on with the burden, Hunzaches would play him so many sad things on his violin until he was proved right that the world really was a valley of yarn that was not worth appreciating. The gang used to help him realise this with all sorts of little tricks, with suitably lit fires, sharp wooden stakes or sharp knives. He took great care to ensure that only invited guests were admitted to these social gatherings. That's why the pebble that had knocked him on the shoulder from the vault had angered him to some extent. He stood on the mountain block and stamped the ground, the shining lights streaking through the forest.

After a while, they gathered round him.

"Someone's been there," said the bad-luck dud.

"I know that, you arsehole" Hunzaches was in a really and seriously bad mood.

The black salsify stormed through the walls. He snorted skilfully with two fingers and said: "Someone was walking up the hilll I think it was a womanl"

"There is a long-skirt venison dish"

They spread out. took the forest between them

in labour, shining light into the folds of the bushes, lifting all the shadows. Broken twigs and mossy drucL led the way uphill.

Under the rock face, on the ledge above the tops of the fir trees, the crucified man stretched out his pale arms. Between the inward-curved toes, the little wine-red light illuminated a carved cone of blood hanging down from the pinned ankles.

Godly men living in the forest have nothing to hide. A crooked little gate seemed to close a goat pen. Behind it, in the rock room, the hermit lay on the straw. It reeked of cowl dirt and the mushrooms of the Bible, which were smouldering in the corner under the mortuary pot, large and rude; a smell of incense 'clearly sacred' lingered in the air.

"Praise be to Jesus Christ," said the captain, "Didn't you see any women running?"

The man of God was sitting on the chute, sleep-disturbed, little eyes twinkling above his beard, which was broken in half, and above that was a pious baldness that stretched all the way into the nad'en. A torch glowed over his bare feet, the big toes of which stood away from the rest and upwards like thorns.

"What do you want?" he shouted, half awake, "didn't I tell you, you roast raven, not to come up here to me?"

Hunzaches crossed himself and ducked. "I wonder if any women have run in7"

O son of hell, thou fornicator, wilt thou tell me that at night time the women are in my bed of straw?

am I a filth like you?" The hardened man sôiw8ng the belt rope, the robe shivered around his skinny bones.

The torch of Wenceslas the Prager descended into the hermit's bed.

"Do you want to set fire to my straw, gallows company, pack yourselves." The holy man bent down, clenched feudal clay, hurled the **lump** at the **captain and** it smashed against the pitch black's cheek. Then they left. The hermit followed them, grabbed the rough railing at the edge of the precipice and screeched over the treetops so that the forest echoed. "Ravens will eat your guts, your skin will be peeled off, horses will dismember you I"

Then he scratched the grey grind on the top of his head with his horned claws, lambed a strand of beard hair between his stubby teeth, wiggled back into the cave. He groped for steel and stone, struck sparks and lit a dim lamp. At the bottom of the cave, where white, gold-fringed linen hung down from a rough altar table, there was a stirring. A corner was lifted, the fringed hanging was parted. The image of the Blessed Sacrament, surrounded by rays of light, trickled in the dim glow, a pious symbol for the prayers of needy women from town and country. Bastiana emerged from all of them.

"Come on, my daughter," sighed the hermit,

...hcut, I lied the hell out of the shark because of you."

"That's a sdireckbarer Ceselll Between the fringes I looked him sdiarf in the face."

Despondent, the pious man stood before the skull and scratched the top of his head: "0 vanity with

lies and

Deception, the world's turmoil that reaches into the deepest forest. There they whisper to each other and we all let our hair down. My soul has lost its fire."

"Should you have confessed to telling the truth? They would have torn midi apart."

"The truth is a dried bush." He waved his hands backwards violently. "Go on. be careful they don't catch you. I'll smash your head if they hurt you, O holy mother of God, ask for forgiveness for our sins."

The forest fell silent again, stirring softly in her dreams, Bastiana descended the steep hermit's path to Oppa. She still smelled the smoke and dampness of the hermit's dwelling. Rocks kicked threateningly against her, the path was trodden through the body of crushed trunks. The descent ran out into the open. Flowing water gurgled and gurgled behind the willow bushes, she scratched along on gravel.

There was a loud whistle and a shrill reply from other sides, left, right, front and back. "Fetch fetch" like on a chase, rattling and crashing in the bushes.

Bastiana stopped, defended herself against the sudden rush of thoughts, snapped back to her senses. She ducked into the darkest part of the city. She saw someone running along the edge of the river, mud underneath her, a shoe remained in the viscous mash: some- how, as if to FIu8 lorn, through it and onwards. In the twilight, under hanging branches, a large lump of flnsternis stirred, snorting softly. Bastlana fa8te em warm fur, on which dew darkened, a soft muzzle blew questioningly into his hand,

Suddenly her chest was heaving with sobs. The saddle was there, the stirrup was there, the bridle was twisted around the tree branch. She pulled it towards her, lifted her foot into the stirrup. Blessed Virgin Mary, twelve candles on your altar in the parish church and a hundred gold guilders to the Sisters of the Bloody Heart.

forced into a wild embrace. Arms were wrapped around her from behind, bear paws, a chin pressed her shoulder, inserted like an iron wedge, knees pushed against her kneeling groin.

"Blassell"

The horse jerked, jumped, Bastiana was thrown, a body rolled over her, squeezing out her breath, a hand clenched her neck, digging fingers went into her dress. She reared up, threw her body, an iron grip was clawed into her left breast. Before her fading gaze, in a flicker of red, she saw Angela, naked, stretched against the wall, with welts and stains from her shoulders to her thighs. A hot bi8 ripped her cheek. She fisted the dagger in her belt, squeezed it out from under the mountain burden, raised it above the man's neck and plunged it in twice, hard and fast.

He shouted: "I've been stung" and slipped away from her, to the side, she saw the robber's face with the battle-scarred moustache, she thrust her tightened legs against the centre of his body so that he made a muffled bleating sound like a bagpipe being kicked. Blood was pumping out in starLng bursts from between the fingers he clasped around his neck. She lifted herself from the floor as he struck

Once his fangs at her, under her skirts. over her garter, around her bare knee, and pulled her towards him by the leg. Her doldi cut him across the fins, he roared, sÔilked his hand and splashed blood on her face.

Bastiana threw herself into the willows, deep spie8rods, whistles fell over her like throwing snares. There was the horse again, with its shark lowered, grazing. The bank suddenly broke off here, fell into the water with a clay-red slide. She jumped into the saddle of the startled horse and plunged her dagger into its croup, causing it to plunge blindly into the void. Water splashed together, she steered the kicking horse crookedly across the river, hit the ground, clattered dripping over a gravel bank, saw the horse's front body rising steeply above him and bent low over his neck to help him climb.

A meadow with a white fog, a road with trees to the left and right, a covered wagon behind her with a clumsily arched body. A cool autumn wind blew towards her wild gallop, drifting across the pale eastern sky in pink feathers.

The wedding party waited into the morning for Bastiana to return home. They were then

... "Reichsadler" emptied the cellar more and more and became fuller and fuller themselves. Only the town clerk Christian B1r had done more honour to the jugs, more and more soberly as his anxiety grew. He had cut off the heads of his dolls, both male and female, and the decapitated bodies had been placed on the innkeeper's dung heap. He felt as if he himself deserved nothing better. He stood restlessly at the

Window. the guests' racket behind him, the slowly brightening courtyard before his eyes.

You have to go and look for them, he thought, as the piece of world between the stable and the cellar wall began to look more and more horrible to him.

Bestiana?" laughed the Ridite, "she's probably home by now, curled up in bed."

The innkeeper shakes his head, his two eyes had shown him Bastiana's chamber empty just a quarter of an hour ago.

The town clerk opened the window, the haze of people filled his head with confusion, the morning air swirled with smoke, pushing him outside in grey clouds. Hoofbeats rattled from afar, a rider jumped off her horse.

"Bastianal Bastiana on horseback"

They threw their arms round each other, one against the other, craning their necks. Bastiana stood in the doorway, her dress full of mud and water around her body, torn to shreds, her eyes unblinking, a crusted wound on her left cheek. She threw a bunch of crushed, wet, red berries from her belt pouch onto the ground, causing it to smack. "They've descended on the wedding party. Angela and the bridegroom are dead in the castle."

Chairs fell over, people backed away from Bastiana, one laughed loudly, grumbling because he thought they were joking. "I've killed Hunzaches, that's his role." Some people began to lose their senses and looked around for the bride's parents, but they had long since gone to bed: the town's

Schreiber pumped air into his chest and suddenly began to sob convulsively.

"Don't stand there," shouted Bastiana, "for Jesus' sake, do something."

Then they began to run about, cursing, clenching their fists, swearing gallows and death and drumming on the table. The town captain Stackenbach, who had the greatest intoxication poured into his head and limbs, was the first to lose it. He smashed a tankard to the ground, drew his sword half out of its sheath and thrust it back again, rattling, and shouted that he would hang himself on the gallows if he did not bring the gang to it. Líef left to call his pack to arms. Half an hour later, they set off with spikes and poles, clutched the hill of bells and entered the nest from all sides. But the nest was empty, only two little eggs were hanging in the vault. The rest of the party, who had set off from the "Reichsadler" in a wine-drinking mood, were found in the woods on Troppauer Strasse with slit throats and elbowed heads. An angel in stone was placed over the common grave of the robbers in the cemetery in Jãgerndorf, and many funeral masses were said for their salvation. The people of Troppau erected six crosses in the woods at the site of the murder, the Latelnsdiüler sang more, and the priest of St Mary's Church spoke of God's permission.

Stackenbach raced behind Hunzaches and his gang up and down the country, drove into every thieves' corner and brought all sorts of previously tolerated things to the lid. And Themis, who can't exactly see whether you're

He dealt with a few travellers, gypsies, thieves and Jews as harshly as if they had been snatched from the middle of the pile by Hunzaches. Stackenbach swung his sword, puffed out his moustache and rumbled in the vestibule of justice that he would drive them all into pairs. But he swore to Calgen that he would do it a second time. Afterwards, around Christmas time, a woman came to a sdiuster called Matows1i. She was from the village of Liditen, and she wanted a pair of sturdy, strong slippers, lined with fur on the inside and neatly trimmed with a strip of fur on the outside. That would cost his good money, the cobbler insisted. There was nothing wrong with that, he said, he should only take good fur and beautiful leather, and there, at the top, she wanted a cap made of red corduroy. The S¢hustar gazed at her pointing hand, riveted it down, measured the length, width and height of the bulging plump feet with strips of paper and drew the ticks on a raggedy briar patch. He squinted at the woman's thick, red fingers as if he were more of a hand diuh- than a shoemaker. He didn't know whether he had any corduroy leather to hand, he said. He wanted to have a look before he spoke. He went away, stayed away for some time, then came back, said yes and began to talk at length about shoes, shoemaking, crafts in general, trade and commerce, the Turks and the Emperor. You could see that he had thoroughly thought the world through from side to side. The woman gave only rough and clumsy information, so that one realised that she had not been able to deal with such rummaging.

little delivered. He finally rattled off, took the basket from the floor, knocked it over and wanted to leave.

But the four city knights were standing under the door.

"That's siel," said the master. She glanced round the shop, ran at the master, who fell to the floor, and jumped to the back door. There were two blank games crossed, there was no running back. From behind, they threw her arms around her waist and tied her arms.

"This is the ring," cried the cobbler, "I have seen it on the hand of Mr Jonah's daughter, which she took with her bridal shoes." A little golden noose was twisted around the woman's finger, which had large eyes and a red crown.

She was dragged through the streets, the people ran together. One of Hunzache's men had been caught, they shouted, his mistress had betrayed herself. Bastiana stood at the window and saw a coarse, hulking woman with a red face, sagging breasts and a basin like a brewing kettle, shouting abuse at the top of her lungs into the crowd. She felt bitter and sick and went to her bookshelf and picked up Boethius' philosophical book of consolation.

Farmers from the village of Lichten came and said that the woman was known to them; she had been living in a house for a long time, the inhabitants of which had died of the plague before. She called herself Matta, but nothing else was known about her.

MeLster Hans MuckensrJinabel understood the questions well. She laughed at him because of the larded rabbit.

sdirie, the devil himself would have to come if she opened her mouth. She squawked and screamed with her thumbscrews, blood ran down her lips, she had taken her tongue between her teeth. As they stretched her fullness more and more, she began to speak. Her name was Matta and she had cooked for Hunzaches and his gang. She had been left behind in the area during the quick departure from Schellenburg. They wanted to get her when they had a good opportunity. Hunzaches, Hunzaches, was a great man, his gang were runaway soldiers, so he was well versed in singeing and flaying. And he was more vengeful than emperor and king and all the German princes put together. They had come as far as the blue Adriatic Sea, he said, and there was gold in the rocky gorges of the Blaniza, and treasures were also buried in the Schellenburg.

Mr Stackenbach was lurking in a forest inn, where Hunzaches told Matta at times, and after a few weeks he caught a fellow. Mr Hans Muckenschnabel took him in for treatment and he confessed that yes, he was Hunzaches.

The robber cook Matta had died in the meantime, so Bastiana was called to the witness1aft. She read Marcus Aurelius as fast as she could be loaded. The colour drained from her, her legs sank into the floor, she looked helplessly along the spines of the books, her breasts began to tremble, she felt the grip of a man's hand on her bare knee, full of shame and excitement. A flight of wild dreams in many nights rushed up, suddenly filled her with the fluttering wings of animals.

Couldn't it be avoided, she asked. But the town magistrate had brought his own dignity here and was now surprised that Bastiana, Miss Bastiana, should suddenly be so timid. He spoke a few words about the eyes of the city and the expectation of justice.

The prisoner crouched in a dark cellar, a slanting space of light had broken into the twilight of the cellar above his head. Under an open trapdoor lay the subterranean vault, with walls that would have echoed the roar of a thousand bulls, torches smouldering, Bastiana saw Master Muckenschnabel sitting on a chopping block and gnawing on a pork rib. A blood-soaked sack was thrown over the crunched bones. AugenwelB rolled in Beard's warmth. Bastiana bent over the bundle of crushed flesh. She had to brace herself against the damp wall with one hand.

"That's not him," she said to the clerk, breathing deeply.

"Not the Hunzaches9"

"Nol" She looked at her white hand, which was stained by the green sdilam of the masonry.

A hole in the prisoner's beard gaped. "Ho hol," he bellowed, "that's just not me. I'm the Schwarz wurzl." He had been ambitious, Gro8mannssu1t had tempted him to pretend to be the high hero.

The town clerk had been walking round Bastiana for a long time; the doll's head from that terrible evening lay on the table in his room, and he had been painting the features of the woman he had mocked for so long

They looked at him longingly until they really gave him back a likeness. Then he spoke to him and they had long, tender conversations. One evening, the doll's head said yes On the day of the wedding feast, the town clerk stood solemnly before Bastlana, shaking out a proposal, he knew well, but he was hoping, and he could too. The young lady let him speak, and the leaves of the Anęis ran through her fingers. Her face was narrow, her eyes sad and distant when she raised them. The doll Lopí at home had lied. Christian Bãr cut it in two with a wooden knife and put the spar in the fire, in the town he spread the word that the landlady's daughter from the "Reichs Adler" was pregnant with a prideful devil, what was unclear about her origin, she interpreted it as a certificate of nobility.

The old woman Barbara Sto8in lived on the city wall in the little snow-white castle. She was very fond of all the card sisters and fortune tellers, and she used mirrors, herbs and lead to make holes in the curtain of the future. A woman in a haze came to her and spoke through the veil, asking if she wanted something against her constant restlessness, strangeness and bad thoughts. What kind of restlessness, whether from the heart, the head, bile, hatred or love, envy or other desires, and what kind of evil thoughts, the woman had to ask. But the veiled woman wouldn't say anything about it, so the nurse couldn't help, but she told Christian Bär that now Bastiana would find one more consolation in the books, that he should just wait patiently, that everything would come to fruition according to his wishes.

The town clerk waited in vain. t80

Four years had passed and there was always a wedding feast in Jägerndorf in which the town took part. Splendour and bourgeois wealth promised an abundance of merriment, the Margrave of Ansbach-Brandenburg had come to the town, his knights and lords were happy to join in the dancing. Maria Apfal- thaler was the bride, a little daughter of the court like Bastiana, the
The "Goldene Sonne" was no less than the "Reichs-adler", half of the owners lived there, half here. The girl in her youth was reverently and intimately attached to her older friend, carried her love after her in all ways, rejoiced in every word and every look that the adored, touched by the attachment, gave her. She wept over Bastiana's reluctance and begged her to agree to be her bridesmaid. The knights who lived in the "Imperial Eagle" sent an envoy to ask for the honour. The host of the imperial eagle roughened his head: "I don't know what the lords will judge. Since the evil /Vtartini day, she has refused me every high time." In the end, Maria did get over it, Bastiana put on the festive dress and stood before the bridesmaids. The eagle landlord was pleased that friendly and envy-free honour could be shown. Bastiana danced the wedding dance with the noble Lord von Sedlnitzky, the duke's chamberlain, and the town clerk watched her dance with a grimace.

It was as if a bolt had been broken, a door had been opened, Bastiana regained her laughter and her favourite word, milder than before and not mockingly angry. It ri8 sle sleter hln, to merriment, she took Sdierz and gave him back, threw back her head, like a horse rushing from the stable, flashed out

hot eyes. She swayed, stepped and jumped over all timidity and restrained seriousness. She stormed into something that nobody saw, not even herself.

On the third day, Mr von Sedlnitz1y stayed out, having been called home by sudden news. A gentleman brought the newspaper, an unknown relative who had been asked to take the dancer's place. Now Bastiana walked by his hand in the round dance, he was handsome, slim and black, a golden chain with a star cross hung around his neck. He had seen many countries, of which he told strange stories, of Turks, Welsh and Hungarians. Bastiana often laughed hotly and loudly, burning her eyes into his face when he spoke, and she nodded against his drinking. They walked in the garden under torches, travelled under a red canopy in the boat on the FIu8, and her hand played in the water, as his also sank over the edge of the boat, caught her fingers, the waves gurgled in her cupped palms. He sighed, **suddenly** looking angry and hostile, his face drained, shadows of unhappiness drawing into his eyes. Bastiana's heart turned its tip upwards, wanted to break free, the mark of a man's grin burned on her bare knee.

Mr von Szitra-Tärok spoke strangely in his foreign German about the fate of life. Bastianc took the words from his mouth. They sank into her like into a well of shame, heavy and dark. Then suddenly he left her, disappeared and never came back. She walked through the house and garden searching, her head ached, her feet were sdiwer.

The next day tyre jumpers, fire dilu':ker

and knife-throwers, the women screamed when the bare blades drove into the wood close to the boy's body. Suddenly Mr von Szitra-TdroL was there again, greeting everyone, and when some of them were astonished at the contortions and cheeky tricks of the travelling people, he said that in all these things it always depended on certain hands and knees. He then slipped off his sleeve and asked Bastiana for the pin that held the veil on her hair. He took it between two fingers, stretched the other three out in front of him and plunged the thin pin into her flesh so that it came out on the other side of her arm. The needle was inserted as far as the lapis lazuli button, but not a drop of blood fell. The people looked at him in amazement, Bastiana gritted her teeth, her abdomen cramped, she saw, as he pulled the needle out again, that flesh and skin clung to it and went with it a little, like water on the edge of a glass. Then she held the needle in her hand again, the steel was warm, but there was no trace of blood on it, as if it had found its way through the body without striking a vein.

"Have you hurt yourself?" she asked in the evening in a tree-lined corridor that was black and green and filled with the scent of roses. Over there they dined with unseemly noise, at the end of the tree-lined passage a fountain sprayed, the jet rose up, spread out into an umbrella and fell down in a dusting, catching red and yellow light and carrying it with it. Summer threads were stretched criss-cross through the corridor, from tree to tree, Bastiana walked through the bushes, she felt

I put it on my forehead, mouth and cheeks, wiped my face with the cloth. It was as if the darkness was weaving a net that was getting tighter and tighter.

Later on, Mr von Szitra-TâroL looked up at the sky, which was full of constellations. "That's my starl" It was a restless, twitching, glittering star. Bastiana recognised the crown, the lyre, the slwan, she stood with her head back, the cool night wind blowing across her upturned throat. The knight kissed her on the punished shark, she felt his teeth on her artery, ready to strike. She lowered her head and remained silent. After a while she asked him again about his star, he pointed to the sky. His finger stabbed at the constellations after Vega, but it seemed to her as if he had meant Arcturus earlier.

Then he said he would wait for her in his room around midnight. They would be in the mood for fun at that time and no one would notice her absence. "Roses grow outside my window, only the roses will see you"

In the dance hall, they swayed again in the round, clear fiddle, coarse fiddle, plaschperment and ba8 wa1led and sang. For Klarfiedler sank his weary hands, Mr von Szitra-Tdrok took the violin. sdilug the Belne over each other and began to play. The sound tool changed the soul, no longer did the stammering sound come out of him, soft melancholy sobbed. It pushed the comrades away and ms silence, it forced the round dance apart and ms louse. They stopped dancing and gathered around the stage, where the foreign knight stood over the

He hung on his fiddle and let the zone flow from his body into the strings. He swayed his upper body, shook his falling black hair, the lament died away, and in its place a harsh joy arose. The notes jumped and splashed from the fiddle, exuberance thawed, the high notes whirled brightly into the low notes, and these rose up laughing, the line lay broadly across the wooden belly. They had never heard them play like this; it was as if a long-awaited bliss of victory was shouting. Bastiana stood next to Mr von Szitra-Tärok and looked unblinkingly at his violin-playing hand, leaning over his bent neck.

The Lord of Stad'enbach sat among the standing carousers and drank Malvasia. As midnight approached, someone touched his shoulder; the maiden Bastiana had stepped behind him. He took her hint, she was deep blue, her hands choking on the golden necklace.

...Mr Stadthauptmann, today you can free yourself from the gallows to which you have promised yourself."

He gurgled like a half-full flask that had been drained, but didn't understand.

"Hunzaches is dal"

Stackenbach leaned against the wall, his Sdiwert standing between his legs: "Wot"

"You mustn't shout if you want to see him. Here he is, on the Hodizeit, among the guests, calling himself Mr von Szitra-T6rok."

He shook himself in disbelief, lead had congealed in his legs. "How dare you†"

"I saw my cut on his hand, the scar across all four fingers, the bites from my Doldi on the back of his neck."

Plötzli1 the news came thundering into the town captain's consciousness. It wasn't a frightened young lady spradi, it was Bastiana. He braced himself from the wall, stood with his legs apart, stared at the things that passed him by, and kept his eyes fixed on the background. Then he let out a long, wild fludi and ran away.

Bastiana went to her father, hugged him and laid her head on his shoulder, making the old man very happy. "Do you believe that I am a noblewoman? When will you tell me?"

"I don't know, my child. Your origins are dark." He wanted to tell the long story again, about the linen weavers who had a whimpering child lying on their doorstep one evening. Bastiana shook her head. Mr Christian Bär went after her. Now that her dancer had left her and was following her like a shadow, did she want to make love to him? The young lady did not hear him, said she did not think so, perhaps tomorrow would bring it to light. She resisted his company, walked into the garden, alone, into the courtyard; above, behind a trellis of climbing roses, a light was burning. She stretched her head, the wind breathed over her bent neck. Slowly she turned through the dark streets towards the "Reichsadler". Someone was lying in the gutter, vomiting and moaning, she climbed over him, lam home and, after she had lit a light, she stroked her hand over the long row of books on the back of her desk.

of sparkling constellations that wriggled and buzzed like flies in the web. It burned like a port-wine stain on her knee, her breasts stared heavily.

Suddenly, she s1rie quietly, without looking back at Boethius, she ran away; the door remained open, and the light licked after her with a broad tongue. A grim, arch voice rose and spoke through the night. Twelve times from the parish tower, above them the other bells woke up and repeated the hour, each clapper striking Bastiana on the head and back. It seemed to her as if the whole town was ringing with hidden waters. Above the brown, heavily curved staircase, always up the worm-eaten, brown ba(ken steps close above her head - my God, this staircase was drilled into a tower - now she polished into the tower.

He was sitting on the bed, playing with the nails on his half-open doublet, with a dainty smile on his face.

She flapped her arms: "Fortl Fortl The town captain is coming with his gang." He had jumped up silently, the gentleman's smile slipped from his robber's face, he wrapped his fist around Bastiana's hanging strands of hair and almost pulled her head off her shoulders: "Delilal Delilal "All things flowed apart into strips, her happiness was unspeakable. A dragon with an iron scaled body and pointed wings leapt out of the wall, usually carrying the light between the horns of its head. in which Hunzaches knotted Bastiana's hair.

When he had silently pulled the horse out of the stable and harnessed it under the stars, she was there again;

It ran black over her face, from her temples, where the skin and hair had remained on the dragon. She pulled the train from the hem of her dress and wrapped it around the horse's hooves. "Take me with you! Take me with you," she rivetted.

"What do you want?" he says.

"Take me with you." She pulled herself up by his legs, put her other hand on the saddle pommel, he caught her under the arms, now she was in front of him, grabbed the horse by the mane. The glow of pitch torches burned over the courtyard wall, glowed over the house walls on the other side up to the gables, voices murmured at the gate, the dance music was wiped out, shadow rags clung heavily to the windows of the Sasles, footsteps thudded in the house. Out the back, through narrow streets, in an inaudible corridor to the little wall gate. Voices were there, up above, spie8e were running over the wall.

"Damn it," said Hunzaches and turned the p(erd. In the kennel, he walked silently to the next gate. A tower vault was blocking it and held the gate with another over there. But outside, a steep, narrow staircase climbed to the top of the wall. "Hold on tight, they won't get me." Ron sat down carefully, panting anxiously, his hooves wrapped around his back. His taut mane of hair lay in Bastiana's hand, the man behind her snapping in encouragement.

Then there was a resounding sound on the course: "Höl" shouted a surprised man, the horse made a leap, he fell, reaching into the air, screaming. Clattering, it ran up and over from all sides, lifting the horse between the man-high battlements, huge, with beating front feet. For a blink of an eye

they saw it standing ghostly on its hind legs, taking two steps towards the edge of the wall.

And jumped.

The trench was deep and dry, with the double load on its back it rolled over in the fall, hard, booming darkness rolled along. Landslide and falling rocks. Bastiana lay half-stunned on the side; kicking, legs up, the Ro8 rolled, the man groaned with his chest pressed in. "Out ... out" This penetrated Bastiana's stupor like a bright light piercing a dark cellar, and she lurched towards him, groping at his face. His fingers clung to sticky clots, saws rattling in his chest.

"You are my bride. So I tell you, the treasure they sought in vain lies in the castle of bells. There in the vault under the rowan tree ... next to the entrance linLs. The third stone. The one with the red spot ..."

Si- ri8 undid her dress, took his hand and placed it on her left breast. That is how he died.

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