



The Sorcerer's Apprentice

By

Hanns Heinz Ewers

Translation by
Joe E. Bandel

Illustrations by
Mahlon Blaine

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Chapter One

*Thou
who seek'st Grace or beauty
here Be warned! For in these
Pages hovers terror Asleep: and
from these Covers Grin horror,
Infamy and fear.*

*-Osc. Panizza: SAINT
ANTHONY*



Do come along with me,” said Frank Braun.

The old priest shook his head. “It’s impossible,” he answered, “quite impossible.”

The small steamer on Lake Garda stopped; the two men followed the crowd ashore. Frank Braun looked for the porter of his hotel, found him at last, beckoned to him and gave him his luggage receipt and handbags. Then he turned once more to the priest.

“May I accompany your Reverence?”

“No, if you’ll forgive me,” said the old man. “I have to go to the rectory to attend to several things there. But if you’ll permit me I’ll look you up at your hotel tonight.”

“It will be a real pleasure—I’ll see you at supper then, Don Vincenzo!”

The priest shook hands with him. “I’ll see you later, then.”

Frank Braun walked slowly in the direction of the hotel, which lay close by the lake. He ordered a room, washed himself and wrote a few letters. He took a walk and returned just as the dinner gong was sounding. Instead of going to the dining hall, however, he first went to his room. He shaved carefully and slowly and then dressed for the evening. When he entered the dining room the third course was being served. He found the priest sitting at a little table near a window.

“I’ve made you wait,” he excused himself. “It’s a bad habit of mine . . .”

He looked over the wine list and asked his guest’s advice. Soon he hit upon a brand of which the latter was fond.

“That’s strange!” He laughed, “Just what I prefer myself.”

But he scarcely drank half a glass, and ate very little. He did not order the courses that had passed and took care that the priest’s plate did not become empty. For dessert he peeled two large Calville apples. The old man ate these with his cheese.

“Don’t you eat apples either?” the priest asked.

“Certainly,” answered Frank Braun.

He took a slice and sprinkled a little salt on it.

The priest shook his head, “Salt? Salt on apples?”

“Certainly, your Reverence. It’s the only way to bring out the flavor of the fruit.”

At once the priest dipped a slice of apple into the salt-cellar.

“That’s too much, Don Vincenzo, too much!”

The German laughed. The other scraped the salt off.

“Is this the way?”

“Yes, that’s it.”

The old man tasted the morsel.

“Yes . . . yes . . . you’re right. The pure flavor becomes more definite. I’ll note that, Doctor. I’ll pass it on to our Bishop in the near future. He knows how to value these fine little points. After all, one must get to the bottom of things!”

“To be sure, Don Vincenzo. That’s the first thing to do.”

“I beg your pardon—but why the first?”

Frank Braun filled his guest’s glass.

“Well, what I mean is: one’s diagnosis must always come first and foremost. Suppose, for instance, we wanted to make an apple; first we must know exactly . . .”

“Make . . . an apple?” the priest interrupted him. “But we don’t want to make an apple.”

Frank Braun said, “Why don’t we want to? We want to make everything. But let’s take another instance, if the future art of making apples seems too remote for you. Take some disease—cholera, for instance. We can’t begin to go about combating the disease effectively except from the moment in which we know precisely which germs cause the disease and their behavior. Exact knowledge is always first—in all things. Isn’t it, your Reverence?”

“Oh, yes, certainly!” The priest emptied his glass. “I understand what you mean now, Doctor. But, if you’ll forgive me, my mind isn’t quite satisfied at your sudden substitution of cholera for our apple. You wanted to make the apple, didn’t you, Doctor? Just as we see it lying here or hanging on the tree. But cholera! Your aim is just the contrary—to destroy it. You want to fight it—but surely not to make it.”

The other smiled, “Don’t we? And why not? You, your Reverence, to be sure, would hardly care to employ yourself that way. And I—well, I’ll probably never have the opportunity either. But what about other people? Don’t we, during any good year, invent some excellent new means of sending as many people as possible, as swiftly and surely as possible, from life to death? Torpedoes and machine guns? Submarines and war aero planes? And lyddite and melinite and nitroglycerine and various other fine things? Why shouldn’t one hurl some frightful pestilence into the enemy’s country, some yellow or black death that would be more effective than all the murderous guns in the world?”

The priest crossed himself.

“Holy Mother of God!” he cried. “May all the good saints guard against it.”

The German nodded, “Yes, I hope so too. War is always stupid and has precious few aspects to which one can profitably turn one’s interest. But you’ll admit the possibility of creating pestilences, Don Vincenzo? Any bungler can do it—even today. To make apples! That’s harder, to be sure. But we’ll learn that too—some time. We’re still so young.”

“Young?”

“Why, yes, your Reverence! The earliest human being whose bones have been found lived scarcely three and a half millions of years ago.”

“And you call that young?”

The priest looked straight and sharply into his eyes. Hadn't he once before seen . . .? But surely he was mistaken. No, he had never seen this face before. But the expression reminded him—oh, yes, he did recognize that! Smiling, superior, captivating—despite any struggle on one's part. Once before those features had frightened him—somewhere in a picture? Or was it a drawing in some old book?

He sought in his mind and stared at the man opposite him. This face was smoothly shaven, narrow and sun burned. The eyes were of no special color, they could have been blue or green or even gray. Over the high forehead—lightly arching over delicate brows—fell confused strands of ash blonde hair. The lip was pulled back a bit under the half open mouth. This face appeared young, appeared to be very young—and yet again it could have been older—but how old? The languid opal eyes laughed, harmless, almost good natured.

“He's like a good boy,” the priest thought. “A child, he is a genuine child!”

The stranger answered the priest's long gaze with a smile. Then, however, his eyes turned away, wandered around and looked through the open window upon the lake. And the priest understood those eyes at once: dreamy, phantastic, lost seeking eyes from the land of the soul where all our yearnings dwell. Then the other turned his head again and looked seriously at the priest, almost threateningly. And then the old man scarcely saw the eyes—but he felt their glance keenly. And yet it seemed to him as if this strange and baneful power had not come from them. Or, not wholly, at least . . .

“No, no, your Reverence! You don't know me. This morning when you came aboard at Sirmione you saw me for the first time.”

The German laughed, and it was an unspoiled, healthy, child-like laugh.

“What does this mean?” asked the priest, a trifle confused and yet calmed at the same time by the good-natured laugh.

“You can read thoughts?”

“Is it so hard? You have a tell-tale face . . . but do drink!”

He filled the glass anew, “Do you smoke?”

He handed him his cigar-case.

“Nearly all people have such faces and especially the clergy. It’s difficult to change in that respect, and yet it isn’t a good thing to go through the world like an open book.”

“Thank God all men can’t read that book.”

“Quite right, Don Vincenzo, the number of illiterates is frightful. But there we are again: reading is the first thing. It is the act of sight, of perception, and only then comes the other—writing, and that is the creative act.”

“That’s not for us, dear Doctor, not for us priests.”

“Yet I knew one who could do it well.”

“A priest?”

“Yes, a priest like yourself. More than that: your namesake. I am sure you know him.”

“Vincenzo—? Vincenzo Alfieri! Surely you don’t mean Father Vincenzo Alfieri of Padua?”

“The very one I mean.”

“And you know him?”

“Yes, I believe I know him quite well.”

“Oh, he is a gifted man! He was the best preacher in Italy.”

“He can read and write in my sense; a creative soul!”

“Tell me about him. I once heard him speak in Padua—that was eight, no, nine years ago. I don’t remember what he said, but I’ll never in my life forget how he spoke. It seemed to me as if he were carrying my soul to far heights. Where is he now? They say the Pope has . . .”

Frank Braun interrupted him, “Oh, yes, they say, they say. I can assure you, by the way, Don Vincenzo, that His Holiness really had no reason for breaking off Alfieri’s activities. It was merely a silly intrigue on the part of the Roman Jesuits and finally a question of showing their power against Cardinal Merry del Val, whose protégé he was. I’m convinced that the Pope

saw through their clumsy scheme; but he wanted to put an end to the contention. So he compromised and sent the Paduan to Spain.”

“And does he preach in Spain now?”

“Yes, in Madrid, and with the same overwhelming success. And I tell you that the movement which he creates is no danger at all to the Church. He helps the Church, rather. Imprison him in a cloister for six years and there may arise in him a Mahomet or a Luther. He reads, but he understands only a little of what he reads. And so he only writes—dusty books, thumbed over many times.”

The priest looked at him without understanding. “Alfieri writes? Why, what does he write?”

The German laughed again, “Why, he writes nothing, of course. But he creates—only what he creates is dusty and stale. It’s poor stuff and harmless. But, in all events, he works creatively—and for that reason I love him.”

“Very well, Doctor—but what in the world does he create?”

Frank Braun leaned forward across the table. He rested his elbows on it and stretched his hands slightly forward. Don Vincenzo again felt the gentle compulsion of those strange eyes, but his own imprisoned glance rested on the other’s hands. They were large, strong hands, hands like the horrible paws of a beast of prey. His fingers, spread apart, were narrow, but bony and thick at the joints—inexorable hands, which could wind themselves around a throat like ropes. Wild, pitiless, fearful hands . . . The impression came from them, even more than from the eyes.

The priest stared at those hands. As if from afar the slow and almost solemn words floated to him:

“The Paduan creates; he is a creator. He tears a thousand souls from out of a thousand bodies and molds them into a single soul with the flames of his speech! There they stand, children, women and men—each separate—ridiculous and pathetic creatures! And the Paduan grasps them and kneads them into a great whole, into a single strong mass in the guise of a mad and mighty beast. That is what he creates—that’s it, Don Vincenzo.”

Then he sighed and slowly leaned back. He lit a cigarette and exhaled the smoke in light rings.

“Only, and it’s a pity, a great pity”—his voice almost quivered with sadness—he cannot read very well, this Paduan. And so he shatters the hundred thousand small thoughts in all these heads and does not give them one great thought in place of them! All have the same experience as which you relate, Don Vincenzo: they will remember all their lives how he spoke. Yet they have all forgotten what he said! That beast is there, that splendid mighty creature—but it can neither run nor bite! Oh, it’s a pity, a pity! He might have become an Antichrist. Instead he will remain a harmless preacher all his life! How happy I would have been to teach him to read! . . . But do drink something, Don Vincenzo!”

The priest was silent. Slowly he grasped his glass, lifted it and then put it down again.

Softly he asked, “Doctor, are you a Catholic?”

The question came swiftly, suddenly. The other, however, did not hesitate to answer.

“Not at this moment,” he said quietly. “Who knows but what I may become one again someday!”

He drummed gently on the table with his fingers.

“But let us not discuss that, Don Vincenzo; we won’t contend about religions! This morning, on the steamer, I addressed you, an utter stranger, and you gave me some information in a very amiable manner. It would be very ungrateful of me to involve you now in the kind of dispute that always becomes vexatious.”

“No, no,” the priest laughed, “I’m surely not afraid. I stand on firm, solid ground.”

“Ah, do you think so?”

The German’s voice was almost compassionate.

“You stand just where Alfieri stands. This ground looks hard as the stone of your mountains and yet is an impalpable mixture of loose nebular spots. Ah— firm ground! Just give this man an immovable point on which he may stand and he will lift all Rome out its hinges! It is always the same: To have the great cognition—that is the secret!”

“I don’t understand you, Doctor!”

“I believe that, your Reverence! But hadn’t we better drop the subject? . . . I asked you to point out to me a quiet, lonely place in your parish where I might stay undisturbed for a few months. You mentioned Val di Scodra.”

“Yes,” the priest answered laconically, “Val di Scodra.”

“Is it quiet there?”

“Yes.”

“Lonely?”

“Oh, yes, it’s lonely. You will find no more remote village in the entire world.”

Frank Braun stretched out his hand across the table.

“Don’t be angry, your Reverence! We are all miserable sinners . . .”

His expression was so harmless, so good-natured, that the old man laughed. He took the pro-offered hand and shook it.

“I’m not angry at all. But I gave you all possible information this morning.”

“And I know it all quite exactly as well. Unfortunately I have an excellent memory. And so I’ll soon be living with the good innkeeper, Peppino Raimondi, and . . . But why won’t you come along, Don Vincenzo? You were telling me that you were on a trip of inspection through your parish—aren’t you going to visit this village? It belongs to your congregation in the narrow sense and is your native village in addition!”

The priest interrupted him, “Why, after all, should you want me to come along?”

“Why? It’s a whim—I beg your pardon! I’m planning a piece of work. I must tell you that I write. And for this purpose I need a quiet hole in the mountains. I want to work there. Or—who knows?—perhaps I won’t. In all events I want to be quite alone for a few months, quite alone with myself. Now the plunge into that condition is just like the plunge into an icy bath. You stand there, you hesitate, you wait another minute or two—and then you take the plunge. You see, Don Vincenzo, if you travel with me I’ll have your company for a day or two before I take my cold plunge.”

“Your health, Doctor.”

The priest laughed merrily and drained his glass.

“You want me to act as a comfortable bathrobe for a bit? Unfortunately, it can’t be done, really not—it’s quite impossible.”

“Impossible! A priest who can’t visit a village in his parish?”

“Cannot! Let us say rather: will not. I found a letter awaiting me at home this evening which seems to make it appear desirable that you do not go to Val di Scodra either.”

“Really, your Reverence, you make me curious! I am not to go either? Do you think I would become dangerous to the village? Or that, perhaps, the village would endanger me?”

“Neither one, Doctor, of course not! But according to my news Val di Scodra doesn’t seem to be anywhere near as quiet and calm any longer. Something is going on there.”

“Oh, oh, you are pouring water into my ice cold bath! Well, what is happening there that could be of any interest to me?”

“Probably nothing, in all likelihood nothing at all. The people are holding fanatical meetings.”

“Who are?”

“The people of Val di Scodra. The real originator is named Pietro Nosclere, or Mr. Peter, as he likes to be called. The villagers speak of him as ‘the American’”

Frank Braun became attentive, “And who is this Mr. Peter?”

“Let me tell you the things as they happened, Doctor; then you will grasp the connection at once. You must know that a great many people in our poor mountain villages emigrate to America annually. In the entire Trentino there is no other section from which so many go. Most of them remain over there, but a few cannot forget the old homeland after all; they return as soon as they have earned money enough to buy a piece of land here. Peter Nosclere is such a one. Thirty years ago, when he was a sixteen year old lad, he emigrated. First he lived in New York, then in Chicago and finally somewhere in Pennsylvania. He didn’t have much luck anywhere and scarcely earned enough to supply the daily bread for himself and his wife, a Bergamese woman whom he met in America. It was fortunate that they had no children.

Now it seems that there, in Pennsylvania, he was brought into contact with a fanatical sect which he joined; at first, probably, from purely material motives. Those people obviously took a kindly interest in him, so that the care for his daily bread was immediately removed. He had once been a cobbler, then he turned into a regular shoemaker and then into the owner of a shoe shop. Then his great stroke of good luck came. On the occasion of a lottery which the congregation arranged in order to raise funds for a new church, Pietro drew the first prize of twenty thousand dollars. He stayed there another year, but with the deeply-rooted prudence of our mountaineers he could not make up his mind to invest his wealth in any business. In addition, nostalgia for his old home troubled him more than ever.

So he came back. He didn't stop anywhere, returning by the same route—by way of Amsterdam, Munich and Vienna—over which he had gone so many years before. Even here he only remained one night in the city and then traveled to his ancestral village. There he soon found a farm that he could buy and he has been living on it for three years.”

The German laughed, “Well, well. And your Mr. Pietro now passes his time at home spreading the strange doctrine which was so lucky for him?”

“Yes, that's about it,” the priest affirmed. “It's no particular doctrine, by the way. I've tried, quite in vain, to discover what the man is really driving at. You see, he lives there on his farm and hasn't a thing in the world to do. At my advice he invested his money in government bonds, and the bit of farming—of which he knows nothing—as well as the household, is taken care of by his wife, with the help of a man-servant and a maid-servant. At first he busied himself with his little garden; he also opened a little shoe shop. But both together don't take up an hour of his day. So the memories of his brethren in Pennsylvania came over him.”

“How did he start?”

“He held devotional meetings in his own house. Then he gradually attracted others—day laborers who worked for him, or people he had loaned money to. You understand: he is the Croesus of his village and is respected as a matter of course. Everyone is anxious to please him.”

“And what does he preach?”

“Repentance. He leads the people in congregational prayer and singing. They're all bored to death in their forlorn village the minute they

stop working. So the American's meetings form a welcome change. More and more people flocked to them. Soon his own room grew too small; now he has built a big barn as a meeting house."

"Did he and his sect secede from the Church in due form?"

"Secede? God forbid! It seems that among his brethren in America, too, none gave up his church connection, whether he was a Protestant or a Catholic, a Quaker or a Methodist. I have talked it over with Pietro several times. He isn't really clear in his own mind as to the aims of the congregation in Pennsylvania. He uses the same phrases constantly, speaking of repentance, of sanctification even here on earth, of fighting the devil, and similar things. And for these purposes the Catholic Church alone does not seem to suffice for him."

"Does he openly oppose any of the rites and sacraments of the Church?"

"Yes—and no. He says, for instance: Confession is an excellent thing. But it isn't enough that one whisper one's sins into the safe ear of the priest; one must find the courage to confess them in public assemblies. That is the only way one may succeed in banishing the evil spirit. The devil, he says, creeps around everywhere on earth, and one must drive him away with song and prayer."

"Why, that's quite in the manner of the Salvation Army, Don Vincenzo. And it doesn't seem to me to be acting quite in the spirit of the Church for you to be entirely inactive and simply look on until the movement becomes unmanageable."

"You don't know our mountains, dear Doctor. If you did, you would pass a different judgment. To pay no attention to it, to let the people have their own way, that is the only thing we can do in this case. These people, you see, grow up deep in their valleys, surrounded on all sides by mountains that grow into the clouds. The steep walls oppress them; they live there as if in a narrow prison. Their world is infinitely small, they never see the horizon, and their glance never goes beyond that deep and narrow hole. And so they grow up, generation after generation; their poverty stricken life is narrow, small and surrounded by walls of rock.

Go there and you will see how right I am! And each has some infirmity: one is crippled in body, another in soul. They grope around like

blind men and have so forgotten the nature of life that they do not recognize it even out in the great world. Pietro was in America for thirty years, and knows no more of it than this bottle on the table. It is as if the mountains have pressed upon the spirit of this folk, weighed it down, and held it in an iron vise for centuries—”

He interrupted himself, smiling.

“And now you are about to ask: ‘And you yourself, Don Vincenzo? Aren’t you from there too?’”

“I wouldn’t have asked that.”

“No? But you thought it all the same! Confess now!”

“Thought it, perhaps.”

“I knew it!” the old man continued. “Yes, I am from Val di Scodra myself and therefore I know the people there better than anyone does. But I was taken away when I was a small boy—down to the great plain. And even here by the lake, you see, there is a different race. The people here sail back and forth across the blue waters of Garda and no one clings to one spot. And I lived down there where there are no mountains at all. Then I lived by the sea, where one’s eyes wander far into a distance without end. And there I learned to understand that only on a great and level land, only near mighty rivers or the infinite sea can a great, free, and strong people live.”

The old man took a deep breath. Then he emptied his glass.

“But these Tyrolese folk of mine are small and weak and wretched, whether their language is German or Italian. We proclaim the good Andreas Hofer and the brave Father Haspinger as our heroes and imagine that they fought for liberty, and if you tell anyone that they fought against freedom and for the blackest reasons—he will laugh you to scorn.”

“And you say that, your Reverence, as a priest?”

“I am a priest. True. But above all I am an Italian, even if I am a subject of the house of Hapsburg. And the nation whose language I speak, the people of the plain and of the sea, won liberty and unity only with the help of France and always in a struggle against Rome and against Austria. The heroes of the Tyrol have always fought for these powers—that was their liberty. Even today, after a lapse of a hundred years, they tell of the good Emperor Francis—and yet that was the same ruler who once said,

‘Peoples? What is that? I know nothing of peoples! I recognize only subjects.’”

Frank Braun laughed lightly, “And yet this very Emperor Francis—if you’ll pardon me, your Reverence, was not a German at all. He belonged to the people that you love. He was ninety-nine per cent Italian.”

“You may be right,” said the priest, “I know nothing of that. But for the folk of the mountains he was simply the Emperor and his red breeches were an object of reverence to the Tyrolese and still are to this day.”

“And how many people think as you do, Don Vincenzo?”

“Only a few, a very few! The mountain districts are clerical, Roman and Austrian! Hofer and Speckbacher are heroes of liberty even among those of us who speak Italian.”

He sighed heavily.

“Think—they don’t think at all, these cavemen of the mountains. They do not even dress. They scarcely live; they vegetate like decaying fir trees. Their skulls are small and flattened, deformed goiters hang from their necks. They love God and the Savior and the Virgin and are the most pious Christians in the whole world. But even we priests are sometimes struck with a kind of horror when we see just how much they adore the saints.

As the bishop once said, ‘Our mountains have more gods than Greece and Rome and all Asia.’

—And then, sometimes, their glance turns inward. They become fanatic and fall into ecstasy and attain second sight. In Sempiglio, on the other side of the lake behind Monte Baldo, there lives a mountain peasant who foretells every fire that takes place within a radius of many miles, and often hours in advance. And he is not the only one by far! Scarcely a year passes but that in some remote village these religious visionaries arise. So you see what is happening in Val di Scodra is nothing new. The only new element is that Mr. Peter throws in a few American catchwords and gestures.”

“And you let these people quietly go their way, your Reverence?”

“Yes, that’s it. These are the tactics that our Bishop has followed for over twelve years. He is a very wise man, it is the best way, I assure you. Some of our priests shook their heads at first—today they have all come to

see that he is right. Did you ever hear of the ecstatic enthusiasts of Mezzoveneto?"

"No, your Reverence, I don't think so."

"It was a quarter of a century ago. The people of that utterly remote valley preached repentance; some small prophet led them. They arranged long processions, they sang and prayed and cried and flared through the neighboring villages. Their militant pastor tried all means of bringing them to reason, first by kindness, then by severity. And the bishop of those days turned to the authorities—the movement was suppressed, but not without actual fighting. What was the consequence? Several dead and many wounded on both sides; three people were put in insane asylums, no less than fifty six into penitentiaries and jails. Many fled; a considerable number emigrated, to this day half of the village is empty! And then there was a great scandal and an outcry in all the newspapers. No, no, our Bishop is quite right; we must do everything to prevent a recurrence of such events."

"And you do everything by—doing nothing?"

"Yes, Doctor, nothing, absolutely nothing. And in this way we achieve the best possible results. We let the people do quite as they please and withdraw quietly. After a short while this peculiar intoxication passes away and all stream back to their chapels as if nothing had happened. It was but a flickering fire of straw which delighted these enthusiasts like children, and which was extinguished as swiftly as it flared up. For you see, there is never a definite idea involved. No one knows what he really desires. It is a harmless illness of the mountains, nothing more. Our bishop calls it 'valley fever.'"

"And does he know of this new epidemic in Val di Scodra?"

"Certainly. I made a report at Trieste not long ago when the affair seemed to me to be lasting rather long and to be assuming larger dimensions. The Bishop laughed and averred that at least these new Pennsylvania methods offered a change in the monotony. And he spoke some excellent words which I impressed upon my memory and which I will repeat to you:

'Long after the roaring and rushing mountain-brook of these shallow enthusiasts has spent its foaming madness, one will behold in its majesty

the deep and quiet river of the Church, that stream of God beside whose waves the holy city is glad, that place of the dwellings of the Most High.’

Thus my Bishop spoke to me and urgently advised me to be sure to remain calm. For every pressure, he said, only causes a stronger counter-pressure to arise. It has been months now since I was there. The last time I celebrated mass in their church was for one person, or, if you prefer, for one and a half. For Mr. Peter now holds meetings on Sunday mornings and, of course, they all run to him. My congregation consisted of Teresa, the daughter of the landlord. I recommended the girl to you as her confessor. The landlord himself was there. But he only counts half, for he is really an unbeliever who usually never attends mass. He only came along that time—out of courtesy, so to speak. A little too, perhaps, from a spirit of opposition to the American. It wasn’t much of a sacrifice on his part, for he is very hard of hearing and assuredly didn’t understand a word of what I said to him. By the way, his coming had rather unpleasant consequences for him. He was mayor. But at the recent elections they chose the American. That’s what Teresa has just written me. She is my little spy in Val di Scodra.”

He took a letter from his pocket and looked into it.

“The same thing, over and over again,” he continued. “And the end is not in sight. Four times a week they have great meetings of repentance, with singing and with tumult of all kinds of wild instruments! That’s another one of those American inventions that my dear nephew has introduced.”

“He is your nephew, Don Vincenzo?”

“Yes, didn’t I tell you that before? Pietro is the child of my only sister. And that’s the reason why I want to spare him all difficulties with either the secular or ecclesiastical authorities, which, in the final analysis, would only make things much worse. But you understand now, Doctor, why I can’t accompany you. I dare not go there again and preach to empty benches. That would be hazarding the dignity of our Holy Church. To put cotton in one’s ears, neither to hear nor to see, to leave the people quite to their own devices—that is the right way. Only I doubt whether they will leave you in peace either, with those wild concerts of drums and rattles and fifes. To be sure, Raimondi’s house lies at one end of the village near the little lake; and the American’s farm with its meeting barn is a little way up the mountain far at the other end.”

Frank Braun laughed. “Well, then the disturbing noises in Val di Scodra won’t be so troublesome.”

“So you’re going to try it, Doctor?”

“Assuredly, and no later than tomorrow. Perhaps the American is a man whom I can use.”

“Whom you—can use?”

“Yes, your Reverence. I collect extraordinary people—it’s a whim of mine.”

“But what would you do with him?”

“How can one ever know? The moment decides. There was Columbus, who ran around with a fine notion in his head that was stolen from a good friend. Isabel, the Catholic, gave him three old boats and a hundred jail-birds—he fared forth and found a world. Who knows what Pietro may find?”

The old man shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

“He? I tell you he has no directing thought at all!”

“But suppose you were to give him one?”

“A thought? But what thought?”

“I don’t know. Any. The thought he needs. There lies a certain power in the deep valleys of these mountains—a mysterious, ecstatic, mystical power. And year after year it is wasted in the smoke of a wretched blaze of straw. One shouldn’t let such power lie barren.”

“It is a mere disease, this power. The quicker it goes up in smoke, the better for us all.”

The German leaned far back in his chair and his eyes assumed a strange glow.

“No, my friend,” he said softly, “that isn’t true. Nothing should go to ruin until it has had a chance to live.”

“Oh, yes, evil!”

“No, not even evil. It has its right to live, like everything else. Only that which is ugly is insignificant.”

His voice gathered energy; his hand grasped the napkin claw like.

“Let it but grow, that which you call evil! It will wax great—and everything that is great is beautiful.”

“The basis of thought on which I stand . . .”

Frank Braun interrupted him:

“I know, Don Vincenzo, on what basis you stand. But is it necessary for all men to stand upon the same basis? Why not let your nephew find his happiness where he hopes to find it? Why should one wish this flame to be extinguished because it can find no further fuel? Why shouldn't one throw more fuel upon it, beams and tinder, so that the flame may flare up out of this valley, and rise like a red torch far out of these mountains and into the clouds!”

The old man shook his head.

“That's all very well, Doctor. Only, my poor nephew will never understand your meaning.”

“He doesn't even need to understand. If only he becomes capable of that creative act! If only he can weld his mountaineers into a single mass, as the Paduan preacher did. I want that Beast, that mighty Beast, Don Vincenzo. Trust me, I will teach it to bite.”

The priest crossed himself, “May God himself forbid it.”

Gently the German leaned across the table, but his lips quivered, “Ah, do you think so, your Reverence?—Well, in that case, one must just knock at another gate.”

The old man jumped up and his voice shook.

“What is it you say?”

But he received no answer. His lips trembled a little, as did his hands. He conquered his excitement with difficulty. With eyes wide open he stared across the table.

“Will you answer me one question, Doctor?”

“Assuredly.”

“Well, then—who are you?”

Then the other stood up. A bright and childlike mirth lit up his face.

“Who am I?” he answered.

“No one very special at all. My name is Frank Braun—I can read and write.”





Chapter Two

*“May the libation be Poured for
Indra.”*

-THE VEDA



Frank Braun had to wait several days for the stage coach to leave. The stage went only once a week to Val di Scodra—or, rather, it went above it, along a mountain road, far to the border. High above the village it halted and left a few packages and letters. Someone was accustomed to waiting there and carrying the things down to the valley.

“Don’t take the stage,” the head waiter advised him. “Go in our motorcar. We arrange for excursions every few days at the height of the season, as soon as there are enough people to go. Then you can have the car stop at Val di Scodra and let you out.”

“But will the car be able to take my trunks?”

“Why not? It’s a very powerful car, sixty-four horsepower. It’ll take you seven or eight hours to get there by stage; the car will make it in less than two!”

“Very well, then.”

The car climbed into the mountains on long, dusty and winding roads. The tourists chattered and laughed, determined to enjoy the expensive expedition with all their might. A fat gentleman from Dresden had studied his Baedeker closely and proudly he called every new mountain peak, every waterfall, by name. Whenever an oxcart passed, whenever a sharp curve showed the steep declivity clearly, the ladies screamed, and the honeymoon couple, sitting in front, moved more closely together. Frank Braun stared at the landscape, indifferent and bored. He didn’t speak a word.

“Do you see, over there, on the right, rises the Monte Terlago!” his neighbor explained to him, but received no answer.

The car stopped.

“Here is Val di Scodra. This is where you get out!” cried the chauffeur. He jumped down, unstrapped the trunks, and set them in the road.

Frank Braun climbed down.

“Where is the village?”

“Down there. It’s only a little farther up the road where one gets a view into the valley. I merely stopped here because the path leads down from here.”

“And how am I to get my luggage into the village?”

The chauffeur laughed, “I suppose you’ll have to let it lie in the road for the present. Just go down and have someone fetch it. It is safe enough here, and furthermore, there’s someone who will watch it.

“—Hey, old woman!” he cried. “Come here a moment.”

Frank Braun turned around. He saw an old beggar woman who had stepped up to the car and very conscientiously held out her hollow hand to each of the travelers. She made no haste but waited until even the last had given his kreuzer. Only then did she approach. Her back had been bent by some disease. She curved forward tense as a bow so that her head, with its gray, tangled hair, was scarcely on a higher level than her hips. Her face was twisted toward the left and she squinted upward strangely.

“Hello, Sibylla Madruzzo!” cried the chauffeur. “Come over here! You will watch over these trunks by the wayside. The gentleman is going into the village and will have them called for later. That’s right, sit down on them. That’ll be best.”

Frank Braun gave the old beggar a few nickel coins.

“How long will it take me?”

The old woman moved her lips; she raised her short crutch and made strange signs with her fingers.

“She is dumb,” declared the chauffeur. “But the path is steep, straight down the hillside. I think you can make it in three-quarters of an hour.”

He waved goodbye, and jumped into his seat. The car disappeared in thick clouds of dust. Frank Braun descended the hillside. He was struck by

the complete difference in nature here. Only a few hours ago he had been walking on the shores of Lake Garda—under palms.

To be sure, they had been consumptive, monotonous, trimmed hotel palms, yet they were palms. Bushes of bamboo shaded the ornamental lake, magnolias and broad leaved bananas grew in their beds. Carefully trimmed pines and excessively thin cypresses arose here and there; at intervals stood a mighty eucalyptus. On the mountain slope, under protective sheds, lemons were growing, and far along the lake extended a plantation of crippled olives.

Here all that was changed. The south lay far behind him. And spring, which was in full splendor down there by the lake, scarcely dared to knock here with its modest fingers. The narrow path led down steeply. A few goats passed him seeking the thin grass among the rocks. Then, at a turn of the road, he stood still. Here at last one got a view. He looked down from a broad stone. Below lay a small lake, almost circular in shape. Opposite him the mountain walls seemed to project steeply on both sides almost into the water. It looked as if there was scarcely room for a dog to run along the sides. At his feet the valley expanded a little—there lay the village.

The roofs were scattered irregularly—reddish-brown lumps of weathered tiles. Here a group of houses stood close packed—over there stood two—or just one—as the plain permitted. Slowly the village straggled up the mountain toward the northeast; far in the background one last large roof gleamed faintly. In the middle of the village was a small church. A broad path led from it across the brush covered declivity of the north side and ran on to a flat projection of rock that hung almost above the lake. This table of stone seemed quite level and free; but at its extreme end it bore three crosses, rising to an enormous height. Upon the tallest, raised slightly and at the middle, hung the Redeemer; at both sides arose the crosses of the thieves. It was probably an image of Calvary; he clearly saw the fourteen stations along the path. He descended slowly. He met a boy who was taking a cow to pasture.

“Where is Raimondi’s inn?” he asked.

But the boy stared at him as if he were a ghost, pulled his cow into the thicket by the rope and gave no answer. He went on. Little fields had been cut into the slope, far below he saw an olive grove, here and there climbed a

few old vines among the clipped willow trees. A man was cultivating the ground with a spade.

“Where is Raimondi’s inn?” asked Frank Braun.

The fellow did not stir. He had a broad, hard, beardless face, stupid and ugly beyond measure. A cunning, inflexible peasant’s smile kept his mouth wide open. Frank Braun repeated his question.

“I’m not from hereabouts—”

The fellow grinned.

The German grew impatient, “The devil! Surely you know where the inn is!”

He gave him a few kreuzers, “There! Lead me to it.”

The man shouldered his spade and walked ahead.

“What is your name?” asked Frank Braun.

He grinned but did not answer.

“It seems that one must ask you everything twice. I want to know your name!”

“Angelo,” he said. “But I’m not from hereabouts.”

“I know that already. Where did you come from then?”

The fellow raised his spade and pointed toward the north.

“From there!”

Then he corrected himself and pointed toward the west.

“No,—from there! From Turazzo.”

A house lay in front of them, close by the lake. A broad flight of stone steps led to a small veranda; crimson rambler crept all over it, but as yet none of the small red roses were in bloom. The man leaned his spade against the wall and was about to enter the stable through a low side door.

“Are you in service here?” asked Frank Braun.

“Yes.”

“But you were supposed to take me to Raimondi’s inn.”

“This is it.”

“This?—so you are in service here? And a while ago you pretended not even to know where he lived!”

The man gave an imbecile laugh, "I'm not from hereabouts."

Then he stamped into the stable; the happy bleating of a goat greeted him. Frank Braun mounted the steps, opened the door and looked into the room.

"Anybody here?" he cried.

He knocked with his fist on the table, but no one came. He stepped to the window and looked out across the lake, across the little space in front of the house, across the street. There was not a human being anywhere. He waited a while and cried anew—in vain.

Perhaps the stupid farmhand had led him into the wrong house after all? He went out and wandered through the narrow streets, passed houses and farms. He looked through some open doors and windows and stepped into a garden here and there. Nowhere was there a sign of human life in this dead stillness. A solitary, powerful, black dog lay in the road and blinked at him in astonishment.

"The village is enchanted," he thought.

From the east a confused rumor reached him. He went in the direction of it; the houses slowly rose with the mountain here. Soon he could distinguish sounds—a singing—then the long—drawn out tones of a concertina, and between, the staccato thud and clang of tambourine and triangle.

"The American's concert," thought Frank Braun. "So is that where the whole village is assembled today?"

He considered whether he should go to the meeting, but finally he shook his head.

"Some other time."

He turned around and went back again. Down on the lake, far at the opposite end, he saw a boat. At that point the rocks receded a little, forming a small bay. He saw the reeds at the shoreline and farther back a narrow, triangular strip of land. In the background a mountain torrent leapt down through a crevice which it had hollowed out. It was probably the torrent that had gradually deposited this bit of land. He saw a girl in the boat, arising, then bending down again; saw her lifting baskets from the reeds and carrying them up carefully to one end.

Here was one other person, then, who was not at the meeting! Up there, Sibylla Madruzzo, the crippled dumb old beggar woman; then the little lad with his cow, and Angelo, the farmhand,—who, to be sure, was not from hereabouts!—and now this girl.

At a comfortable pace Frank Braun walked back toward the lake. On the broad bench in front of the house he had first entered sat a gray bearded man in shirt sleeves, comfortably bent forward, and resting his elbows on a round stone table.

“Another one. The fifth who is not with Mr. Peter!” The German laughed, “I’ve done the village wrong; there’s still some life left in it.”

“Good afternoon,” he said. “Are you Peppino Raimondi?”

The innkeeper got up, mumbled something and looked at him in surprise.

Then he took the pipe from between his teeth and said, “Where do you come from, sir?”

“I would like to stay here and live with you,” answered Frank Braun. “Aren’t you Raimondi? Don Vincenzo directed me to you.”

The innkeeper nodded.

“Yes, yes, fine weather,” he said.

“Can you give me lodging?” Frank Braun repeated.

“Yes, yes, spring is coming,” the other growled.

“I want to know if you can give me lodging!” cried Frank Braun, louder still.

Then it occurred to him that the priest had warned him of the innkeeper’s deafness. He did not care to exert himself, so he took a piece of paper and wrote down his wishes. Raimondi took the paper, put on his spectacles, and read slowly, thoughtfully, word by word.

Then he looked at him over his spectacles and asked, “You want to stay for a few months in Val di Scodra? And you want two rooms? And you want to lodge with me?”

Frank Braun nodded.

But the old innkeeper could not yet get it through his head.

“You want to stay—here? And for months? Is that your serious intention, sir?”

Then the other roared into his ears: “Yes, yes, yes!”

Raimondi scratched his head and said, “Yes—I understand very well! If you please, sir—wait just a moment.”

He took his coat from the bench and put it on.

“And so—” he continued, “and so you want to stay here? And for several months? Yes, and what do you intend to pay?”

“How much do you want?” Frank Braun replied.

Both went into the house and sat down at the table. The innkeeper began to haggle. What was it the guest demanded? Two rooms? Two, indeed? Well, if that’s what he insisted on, one would have to arrange it. And what did he want for breakfast? Eggs, too? Very well, then—two eggs. It was his habit to interject a few German words into his speech, so Frank Braun addressed him in German. But the old man understood very little. No, no, he had forgotten all that in the course of the years. Once upon a time—oh, yes, once upon a time, when he was in the Emperor’s Rifles! And his dead wife, she had been a German from Brixen. This very pipe here was an heirloom from her father. But his daughter, yes—Teresa—she spoke German as well as the Emperor himself—whom God preserve!

“Someone has to fetch down my trunks,” said Frank Braun.

Trunks—and so he had trunks, too? And where were they, on the public road up there? So he had come in the motor car? Well, the manservant would have to go up to fetch the mail at once. What? Yes, yes, he was postmaster, too. He opened a drawer and lifted out a handful of postcards and a few sheets of stamps.

“Do you see, this is the post office of Val di Scodra?”

Then he went to the window and called out to his man.

“Angelo! Angelo! Put the packsaddle on the mule. And don’t forget the ropes. You must fetch down the trunks that are standing in the road. Old Sibylla is watching them.”

The fellow nodded and went toward the stable.

“Tell me, why aren’t you at the meeting?” Frank Braun cried after him.

Angelo grinned, “I’m not from hereabouts.”

“Of course! I might have thought it!”

The German laughed, “And so you must live all to yourself here.”

Then he followed the old man up the stairs. The landlord thrust open several doors.

“There are enough rooms in the house,” he said. “Which ones do you want, sir?”

There were three rooms on the side toward the lake but one of them seemed inhabited: the other two were almost empty. Frank Braun chose the first chamber and the adjoining one.

“Who lives here?” he asked.

He saw a picture of the Mother of God with a little vessel of holy water at the right and a little perpetual lamp at the left of it. Fresh box tree twigs adorned the frame.

“My daughter,” the landlord replied. “But she will have to move out.”

“Very well, then,” said Frank Braun.

He helped Raimondi carry the girl’s possessions into the third room. Then he arranged the furniture to suit himself.

“Go into all the rooms,” said the old man, “and take whatever you want.”

The German went downstairs and up again, gathering whatever he liked. He moved an old armchair to the window, and pushed little blocks of wood under the legs of the shaky table. He also brought in a small wire basket which he intended to use for waste paper.

“There, carry the clock out,” he said to the landlord, and pointed to the old wall clock above the door.

“But why?” the other asked.

“I don’t like a clock in the room, neither a clock nor a calendar. To be constantly aware of the date and the hour—no, that’s not my way of living.”

“But it isn’t even running,” the old man assured him.

“Not running? Then it may stay. How about a lamp?”

“Yes, there’s a lamp too.”

The old man brought one. Finally he was settled.

“Bring me some water!” he cried.

The landlord went down and filled the large jugs. He did not carry them up himself, but gave them to his man, who had just returned with the mule from the mountain. Angelo dragged the jugs up, then the trunks and the bags. Frank Braun began to unpack, swiftly and skillfully: it was an accustomed task. He was done before the sun sank. He washed himself and went down. In the guest room a stout, heavily mustached Imperial border guard sat next to the landlord, drinking in mighty draughts from a wicker-covered bottle.

“To your health!” he called out to the stranger in German.

“Thank you,” said Frank Braun.

The guard blew his nose.

“Do you know, it was a sensible idea of yours to come—”

But he hesitated, laughed, drank again—the idea didn’t seem so sensible after all.

“Anyhow—it’s pretty fine,” he continued. “Pretty fine!—What did I tell you, Raimondi?” he roared at the landlord.

“What did I tell you? If those praying brethren won’t come, somebody else will! Well, there he is! I hardly believed it myself—but there he is: it’s come true! And you’ll make more money on him than on all those devil hunters put together!”

Frank Braun listened attentively.

“Than—whom?” he asked.

“Than the devil hunters!” the guard laughed. “You must know that this crazy village has an American in it—”

“Yes, I know,” the other interrupted him. “I have heard about him. And so they call themselves devil hunters?”

“Yes, sir!” the guard affirmed. “Because they want to drive the devil out, and exterminate him root and branch with their praying and singing, these Italian fools . . . Well, if I were here, things would be different! Eh, old man?”

Laughing, he nudged the landlord in the belly, “I hunt the devil, too—but in a better way, damn it all!”

He lifted his glass high.

“Come here, you red old alcohol devil, we’re not afraid of you.”

He emptied the glass at one draught and set it down ringing on the table. Then he wiped his mustache.

“So! That little devil’s done for. Eh, Raimondi, we’re the true devil hunters?”

“So these people don’t drink?” Frank Braun asked.

“Not a drop!” cried the guard. “They pretend to be pious Christians and yet they declare the wine which our Lord himself made to grow, a work of the devil. Why, old Noah soused himself to the brim every day, and was a patriarch for all that. It’s been two months since any of these fellows has set foot in the inn. I’m the old man’s only guest, and a poor one at that, for I want you to know that I don’t pay.”

He coughed in over-hasty laughter.

“Just drink, Drenker,” said the landlord sighing. “Surely one must keep one’s cellar open for an old comrade from the regiment.”

“Well, you needn’t go on about it,” cried the guard. “It’s rarely enough that I come to the village. Every three weeks, for a few hours, whenever it’s possible. The damned smugglers give one no rest in the mountains.”

A gleam of light shone in through the door which a young girl was opening. She carried two large candles into the guestroom and placed them on the table.

“Is that your daughter?” Frank Braun asked the landlord.

“Yes, that is Teresa, his daughter,” said the guard. “A good girl. Come here, Teresa!”

But the girl turned around immediately and went out again without speaking a word.

“Bring in the food!” her father called out after her. “Our guests are hungry.”

She returned after a little while, spread the table with white linen and set it. Then she served the supper. Frank Braun bade her a good evening, but she barely nodded. Nor did she sit down at the table, but took her seat on a bench at the other window and took out her sewing. He watched her. She was tall, well-grown, and slender—about twenty years old. Her hair,

like her father's, was black; her large eyes were blue—one could see that her mother had been a German. Frank Braun called to her and asked her to give him some bread. She brought the bread, but she did not answer his questions. She looked at him with wide, distrustful eyes and went back to her seat. He ate and drank and chatted with the guard, while Raimondi sat next to him and smoked his pipe in silence.

He observed the beautiful girl and clearly noted how, now and again, swiftly and surreptitiously, she threw a questioning glance at him. Then he saw how she drew a letter from her pocket, read it, and while doing so again glanced at him.

Frank Braun thought:

“So, the letter the postman brought this evening was for you, my child! And it is most certainly from Don Vincenzo, your father confessor. And he warns you against me, eh, my child? And that's the reason you're so distrustful.”

He smiled and thought:

“How stupid you are, old man. I would not have looked at her, nor touched her, your poor little penitent. But now—why do you tempt me? You are so old and yet still do not know that one desires only the forbidden? And between you and me, poor old man?—what an unequal struggle for that child! Oh, how stupid of you.”

He looked over at her again and desired her at once. Her forehead was straight and not high; it receded at the temples. The thick black eyebrows curved over the deep blue eyes, which were shadowed by long lashes. And the nostrils of her straight nose fluttered and trembled at each breath. Her mouth seemed a little too large, and the lips, fully rounded, glowed like vigorous pomegranate blossoms in her wax pale face. A humility, a silent gentleness, lay on her soft features, but beneath that some other power seemed to slumber.

Perhaps it was something in the nature of genius? This girl might become an excellent artist someday. Or else a great cocotte—

He observed how her breasts rose and fell in her confining corsage. He undressed her with lustful eyes, tore the kerchief from her neck and the heavy silver girdle from her waist. Suddenly she caught that glance. She grew red; shame made her close her eyes; then she opened them with

sudden hatred. Her hand trembled. She arose, stood for a moment and replaced the letter in her pocket. Then she turned and swiftly, with firm steps she crossed the room. The door slammed noisily behind her. Frank Braun stared after her. Slowly the wild, lustful expression disappeared from his face. His lips relaxed, his eyes resumed their gentle dreaminess.

“Poor beautiful child,” he murmured. Then he passed his hand through his hair and shook his head energetically, as if he wanted to drive his thoughts away.

“I want to sing!” he cried. “Go, landlord, bring us the best wine you have!”

He hurried to his room, took the guitar from the wall and returned.

“To your health, Herr Drenker!”

He touched glasses with the guard, then with the landlord.

“It’s a good thing that there are a few people in the village again who know what wine is good for! Will you wager with me that I can drink you under the table?”

“Bravo!” the guard laughed. “But you better not wager, you don’t know Aloys Drenker’s capacity.”



Frank Braun cried, “But I’m going to wager—your helmet against my guitar!”

“My helmet—?”

“Yes! Are you afraid?”

“I? But my dear sir . . .”

“So you accept?”

“I accept.”

The guard growled and lifted his glass. He got up with slow thoughtfulness, loosened the belt from his large body and placed his heavy saber in a corner.

“Now, then!”

Frank Braun tuned his guitar.

“What would you like to hear?”

“It’s all the same to me!” cried the guard. “Sing what you can.”

The German sang bawdy student songs, then suggestive ballads which he had picked up somewhere in dives, and soldier songs, bristling with coarse allusions. Enthusiastically the guard joined in the chorus. His supply seemed inexhaustible. There were verses of the Neapolitan street singers, oozing filth; Andalusian coplas, the melancholy melodies of which more strikingly emphasized their obscene contents; sailor’s songs which, like the cry of captive monkeys in heat, roared after female flesh; verses from Montmartre in which the words and tunes were skillfully blended in cynical indecencies.

The landlord understood very little, quietly hummed some of the melodies, sucked at his glass and his pipe. But the guard roared with laughter, and brought down his broad fist on the table so that the bottles danced. And he shouted the chorus:

*“She comes without her dead lover,
Or any coins,
Through the dusty, dusty forest—”*

He emptied one glass after another. Frank Braun drank with him, glass for glass. Smiling and calm, he poured the wine down as if it were limpid water. He always emptied a glass at one draught. Then he touched the strings again:

*“In Hamburg, that’s where I am
Wrapped in velvet and silks
I lost my virtue here
Because I am a girl for money!”*

*My sister, she always writes me
“Dear Alma, oh come back!
Your mother lies dying in her bed,
She mourns your miserable fate.”*

*My sister, I always write her back:
‘Dear sister, I cannot return!
I lost my virtue long ago,
There is no happiness that
Waits for me at home!’*

*But in Hamburg, that’s where I am
Wrapped in velvet and silks!
I am well off even if I lost my virtue here,
Because I am a girl for money!”*

He sang the songs of harlots, stale, sentimental ditties which peddled out emotions as if they were honey-cakes at a village fair. Herr Aloys Drenker sobbed and clucked in his throat and sighed and took a good deep drink after each song.

“Listen, guard!— I’ll sing you the song of the dance hall harlots!”

*“Yesterday evening in the storm
I went around by The Red Tower!”*

Then, when a flush of sentimentality rose high in the guard’s red neck, and thick drops almost blinded his bleary eyes, Frank Braun flung bright, ironic, impudent stanzas in his face:

*“Girls with breasts so firm and white,
Why shouldn’t I lust after them?
I am so young—like a monkey!
And my father was a priest!”*

Aloys Drenker grinned and seemed all puffed up with pleasure. He peered around with his drunken eyes as if a plump wench were standing near—as if he wished to caress her firm breasts with his stubby red hands.

“Drink, you swine!” the German cried to him.

The guard leaped up. The blood rose into his face, dark blue from rage and shame. But he met a calm, smiling glance, so he shrank back.

“Your health,” he said and drank.

Frank Braun drank with him, again and again. He laid the guitar down on the bench and drank.

“A few more bottles,” he said.

“No—it’s enough,” stammered the guard.

“Enough? So soon? Go, fetch wine, Raimondi!”

The landlord arose; groping, holding himself erect with difficulty. He wandered to the cellar—for the eighth time now. He came back and set the bottles on the table. But he himself did not sit down again; silently, without a “good night,” he tottered out of the room. He went over into his own room and one could hear how heavily he dropped onto his bed.

The other two drank on. It seemed as if Frank Braun were only now beginning, he raised his glass with such pleasant ease. They didn’t talk any

more—they just drank.

“No-no more now,” murmured the guard.

“Drink, if you’re the kind of fellow I took you for!”

He pressed the full glass into the man’s hand. And the guard emptied it, sipping slowly, belching between draughts. His arm fell, the glass was shattered against the table’s edge; heavily his huge head dropped forward.

Frank Braun laughed. He got up, took his guitar and stepped to the window. Melancholy clouds swam here and there in the sky; from among them the narrow new moon shed a faint light across the lake. Silently he sat for a long time on the window bench. Almost unconsciously he took up the instrument and touched the strings gently. Tones came, and soft chords. And songs grew anew out of the dreamy notes and out of his voice which trembled gently and heavy-heartedly into the stillness of the night.

They were Breton songs, songs born of the sea, born of loneliness and a great longing:

*“The cliffs of Paimpol and I,
The old bell tower, my atonement,
I much prefer the cliffs of
Briton waiting for me at home.”*

And somewhere a wall of rock gave back to him a whispered echo:

“waiting for me at home.”

The words lay in his ear, insistently, with quiet music like the tone of an old music box. He listened to this melody, as to a silent, hidden truth which slumbers under stones and ivy. Brittany—that was it—Brittany. And the Tyrol—yes . . . And suddenly he understood, quite instinctively. He found the absolute certainty of that after which he had groped for and sought in the doubtful investigations of long years. A great possession came to him at that moment: a firm faith in the last link of a long chain of new ideas.

Yes, quite assuredly now he would be able to work. How difficult this whole matter had been only yesterday. There was tremendous material, brought together with such infinite care from endless journeys and a thousand books, confused, inextricable almost, a huge labyrinth of fantastic hypotheses.

Now he saw the way; now he held the goal in his hand! It seemed like a ball to be tossed up, and then caught again without fail. He was conscious of victory. He would have liked to thank someone for this faith which the moment gave him.

Almost aloud he said:

“There are no Germans. There are no Slavs. There are no Latins. There are no Celts and no Jews. And neither Greeks nor Albanians nor Armenians. That is all nonsense, stupid, trite, historic lies. There are only three races in Europe. The Nordic: long skulled, blond haired, blue eyed—my race; and the Mediterranean race—dwelling on all the shores of that sea; yes, and between these two, the race of the mountains.

And they are all one people—the wild Kurds, and the peoples of the Carpathians and the Baltic peninsula, the mountaineers of the Alps, in the Tyrol and in Salzburg, in Switzerland and in Bavaria. Also the folk of Auvergne, and finally, the last member of this long narrow series: the people of Brittany; short-skulled, small and dark!

Ah, and the Jews, the Jews . . . What a granite pillar for the structure of his theory. A small fraction of them blue eyed and fair—the Nordic race! Heine was one of them. How often, dreaming and reflecting, had he observed the poet’s picture. Some riddle lay there, some strange mystery. But now he held that mystery fast; it was his own race, his own!

Then a far larger part were of Mediterranean blood—Spinoza, Da Costa, Disraeli!

And finally, the great masses: Alpine folk, hill people, ugly and short skulled.

He quite lost himself. He shattered races like shards; with one laughing stroke he obliterated the questions of the millenniums. It all stood out so clearly now before him—so clear and well determined—now that he had this intoxicated faith. How had he come by it at this very moment? How had these old songs come to him from across the sea, songs that he had not

sung for many a year? And where did this strange feeling come from that the home of these songs must be here, in the hollows of these mountains no less than in the caverns on the shores of Brittany?

These songs—that were so melancholy, solitary, full of yearning. Like this race of the mountains—fanatic, fantastic, inclined to ecstasy. Oh, yes, Don Vincenzo knew them well, his countrymen!

Frank Braun got up; a chaotic light flickered in his eyes. He stepped to the table, filled a glass to the brim and emptied it. Sighing he put it back.

“Ah, the devil, is there no longer any wine that will make one drunk?”

He drew out a card case and took a small folded paper from it. He unfolded it carefully and shook the contents—a fine white powder—into the wine. And at intervals, testing it carefully with his tongue, he emptied this glassful too. He sat down, closed his eyes, rested his elbows and laid his head in his hands. Slowly, like the pendulum of an old clock, his body swayed to and fro.

Finally he got up, sighing deeply. He went out with dragging steps. For a moment he stood on the steps; then he walked down to the lake. A cool but gentle wind fanned his face. And suddenly, without transition, the clear picture dissolved before his eyes, yielded to a chaotic sea of flaming fog. A hot wave of blood raced through his temples, rising in short, rhythmic beats. It raged through his body, through his legs and arms, to the very tips of his toes and fingers. This glow—this infernal glow—

He expanded his chest, breathed deeply, and stretched out his arms. He turned around without moving from the spot on which he stood. Above, in the third window, he saw a faint glimmer of light.





Chapter Three

Innocence what is innocence?

*Where lust is Lord, Innocence is a
light matter.*

-Cicero

*The time for pleasure is Past, its
speeding has Cheated me of my
Desires, they are gone.*

-Evariste de Parvy: Delire



Frank Braun awoke very late. He looked around him, a little confused, not sure at once where he was. Then he jumped up and went to the window.

“Well then—so it’s Val di Scodra,” he said.

He thought back, but hardly knew exactly what he was seeking. His head did not ache; he felt light and fresh. Only a weariness lay in him, a pleasantly murmuring fatigue that slumbered in all his limbs. He laughed. Oh, yes, he had been drinking, as in the old days. And he had lifted his voice in song, a hundred songs and a hundred glasses. He had sung and he had drunk, but with whom? There was Peppino Raimondi, the landlord—and Herr Aloys Drenker, the fat border guard. True, and he had drunk the latter under the table.

And then? What had happened then? He sat up on the edge of the bed recalling it all. Yes, that was it: he had found his goal. A faith had come to him. His glance passed almost caressingly over the table, which was stacked high with books and papers. Ah, now it would no longer be like work; now it would be mere child’s play.

And he laughed:

“The wine gave me all that as a gift. Of what use is thought? The wise men have visions; then they understand.”

His eyes rested on his garments; they lay confused and scattered on the floor. That was hardly his way—had he been that completely drunk? Yet even so—? He picked up his coat; doing so, he saw his hands. Long scratches ran diagonally across them. He went to the mirror: his face showed little wounds and tears all over. Coagulated blood clung to the edges. What was that? He closed his eyes, passed his hand across his forehead. But he was not seeking in his memory, no; he almost fought against these thoughts. Then he shook his head; his lips were tight pressed; they drooped with an expression of harsh resignation, as from a feeling of intensely conscious suffering.

“It is useless,” he said. “I can’t even forget.”

He went around the room, gathered his garments, and laid them across the bed. He strode up and down with long, firm steps.

“Very well then,” he continued. “One must bring order out of all this chaos.”

He noticed that he was speaking out loud and laughed at himself.

“Yes, yes, like all people who are alone a lot!”

He stood for a moment, and then walked again. He drank a glass of water and lit a cigarette. He exhaled the smoke vigorously; then he cried out loud and sharply as if lashing himself:

“Let’s get this over with! This is what happened.”

And he broke away stone after stone from the quarries of his recollection. This is how it had begun:

He saw that glimmer of light from the third window. A faint, thin gleam; and a spark crept toward him as if on a long fuse. He saw it coming, felt it speeding closer and closer, swifter and swifter. But he was not afraid; it seemed as if this mine in his breast was awaiting the kiss of that fire with greedy rapture. Body and soul, both were full to the brim—let the lightning strike! He ran to the house and leaped up the stone steps. He glanced into the guestroom and saw the guard lying on his face on the floor, grasping his helmet tightly with both hands.

“So you won’t give it up?” he laughed.

But he flew up the stairs as if fate were driving him. Yes, it was true, what he had thought upon entering his room:

“It is fate.”

He stripped off his clothes; in a moment he was in his pajamas. And out—a strong blast of wind pushed his breath back into his face, heavy, rank, alcoholic breath. He turned back. His blood still boiled, yet in that moment it was restrained by childhood training.

“I am no animal,” he whispered.

He went into his bedroom, stepped up to the wash basin. He mixed his mouth wash, gargled and spit, then brushed his teeth. He washed himself and slowly went back out. He hesitated before her door, almost afraid. He listened, but heard nothing. Then, swiftly, he turned the knob and entered. He saw the picture of the Mother of God with the box tree twigs in the frame; he noticed that three blue anemones had been added. He saw the little holy water basin on the right, and on the left, close by the window, the perpetual lamp. The faint light fell on the girl’s bed.

She was wide awake; her large open eyes stared at him. Her face seemed pale and her lips trembled. She didn’t speak a word . . . Her blue eyes turned beseechingly to the Mother of God. Her fingers were tightly intertwined. Yes, she was praying. He followed her look. He passed swiftly between her and the Virgin.

“The Madonna sent me!” he said passionately.

He stretched out his hand, grasped her nightgown, and tore it from her shoulders in long shreds. Her white flesh lay before his eyes like the foam of the sea; panting, he repeated:

“The Madonna sent me.”

She screamed loudly as he threw himself upon her. She jumped up and pushed him back. He felt her fist in his face, felt her nails dig into his flesh. He grabbed her around the hips, pushed her back, and forced her head down with his right hand. Then somehow his fingers were between her teeth. He screamed out loud and bit his tongue from the pain. Then he grabbed her braids and twisted them in his other hand, forcing her head deep into the pillows—her teeth let go of his fingers. His right hand tightened around her throat while his left twisted her hand, pushing it up high toward her shoulder. That’s how he took her.

She did not close her eyes and did not weep. Motionless she lay in her pain, looking at him as if he were a horrible, fearful spirit from which there was no escape. And her gaze rested on the hand that imprisoned her arm—that horrible, pitiless, fearful hand.

She lay motionless beneath him—no tears, no complaint came from her lips. But then the sudden strength of his wild fists flowed into his soul. Then passion was reborn in him in a full and pure harmony. He spoke, and his voice was soft and restrained, like distant music. His words sounded strangely alluring in her ears. He knew very well that she was compelled to listen to him. All the tender words that he had ever said to beautiful women became alive now, flowed from his lips; all those and many more—fairer and stranger. He found sounds that intoxicated himself, ingratiating sounds that sang like harps. His words fell like the sweet rain of summer and cooled and covered her naked, tormented body.

Then she wept. But he took her in his arms, carefully, tenderly, as if she were a child. His fingers glided over her cheeks, like the fragrance of acacia blossoms. And his breath played about her temples, trembled in her hair, like the fumes of a holy censer.

“The Madonna wills it,” he whispered.

She turned and looked at him. And it seemed to her that this was an entirely different man from the one who had just—this one she did not know—not he. A great astonishment lay in her silent glance. Only a moment ago . . .

No, she knew no longer what had happened a moment ago. She was lying in the arms of this man, of no other. And gently, involuntarily, her fingers pressed his arm. She was frightened, and withdrew her hand swiftly. But he was not silent. His tongue spoke and his eyes and his hands. He wove the net, mesh by mesh, and ensnared her soul with exquisite words of love. She closed her eyes, and permitted him to kiss her lids. His arms entwined her body more tightly: she felt his pulses hammer against her flesh. A great warmth went out from him and engulfed her. His love enveloped her like a caressing bath. And she did not resist when he sought her lips. Now everything seemed like a dream—and she yielded utterly.

And he felt how a life grew in his arms. The girl in her was dead—and from the hard chrysalis the butterfly gently arose. And he tasted the rapture of this victory to the fullest: how the woman in her had awakened. She was

not ashamed of her caresses. She didn't speak a word, but gave him an entire life of love. A fever seized her and the teeth that had torn his fingers in anger and hatred now bit his lip, bit into his shoulder, insatiable in sudden desire.

She pressed her breasts into his hands, threw her head back and offered him her body. She grasped his hair with both hands, pulled him down to her and greedily drank his hot kisses.

Once she lifted herself half up, "Take me!" She cried. "The Madonna sent you!"

Then she threw herself upon him, red-hot, passionately murmuring, smothering him with kisses and embraces.

And she took his hands, they appeared good and beautiful. They were the hands of the man that she loved. She searched for something that she had once seen in those hands—once—long ago. But she couldn't find it and didn't remember what it had been. She kissed his hands.

She couldn't stay awake and fell asleep. She did not speak, only lay there, breathing hotly, moaning, torn away in this maelstrom of radiant lust.

Later, he awoke. He found her slumbering, breathing softly. Her head rested upon his breast, her arms were entwined around his shoulders. Carefully he loosened her hands, got up softly, without a kiss. He hurried out. He was surprised to find the door still open. And he went over to his room and threw himself upon his bed. He slept at once, dreamlessly, without moving a limb.

That was how it had been. Frank Braun arose, went to the window and gazed upon the sun drenched lake. A feeling of profound satisfaction enfolded him and blended strangely with his pleasant fatigue. He stretched himself, opened his arms wide and laughed happily. These had been victories, three mighty victories.

"I can still drink as of old and find revelations! And I can still love as of old!"

And he was delighted as a boy that he was still master of the three great arts. He took off his pajamas and went to the mirror naked. With a sponge he carefully washed the traces of blood from his face and shoulders, his arms and hands. The song of Edith of the Swan's Neck occurred to him and he said:

*“She saw them on his shoulder
And covered them with her kisses—
Three little scars, reminders of lust,
Where she had once bitten him.”*

And he laughed happily because the wounds of love hurt him far, far more than the others. Then he took a bath and dressed. And only when on the terrace did the question come to him, how would the girl greet him and with what feelings had the new day brought her? He went into the guestroom; the landlord came and brought his breakfast. The man seemed ill humored, and at once handed him the bill for last night’s wine.

“You take no chances!” Frank Braun raised his voice to be heard.

“Oh, well,” the old man said, “better to be on the safe side.”

He gathered up the money, counted it carefully and went out. The girl did not come. He breakfasted, and then went into the garden.

“Perhaps she’s on the lake,” he thought.

But no boat was to be seen anywhere. He took a walk and came back to dinner. Again the old man waited on him, morose as ever.

“Could she possibly have told him something?” he reflected.

But he could not force himself to ask. He did ask about the guard, however.

“He rode away hours ago,” growled the landlord. “He rode away in terrible misery. He was feeling more wretched even than I am.”

“How about my helmet?” Frank Braun asked.

“Oh, yes,” Raimondi nodded. “I was to give you his message. He took it along because of course he couldn’t ride without a helmet. But he’s going to buy a new one, he says, and he’ll bring the old one back when he comes here again.”

The German nodded.

“Yes!—and where is—”

But he did not finish the sentence. She must be around somewhere; he would succeed in finding her. In the afternoon he went to his room, straightened out his books, and arranged everything for his work. He gnawed at his pen holder, but he was in no mood to begin. Then he got up and went into her room. She was not there. So he went out, wandered through the narrow valley, up and down—hastily, nervously, impatiently. At supper the landlord again brought in the dishes. He couldn't wait any longer, so he asked quickly:

“Well, isn't your daughter here?”

The old man sat down beside him. His wretchedness seemed to have vanished and with it his ill humor.

“Teresa—?” he said quietly. “She has gone into town.”

Frank Braun nodded. He was glad to be rid of the unpleasant thought that perhaps she had betrayed something to her father. This had tormented him, although he had not believed it for a moment.

“To the city?” he repeated.

“Yes,” said the old man. “She wanted to see her father confessor.”

Her father confessor! So she wanted to confess! He laughed. What a face Don Vincenzo would make when he heard of the curious effect of his warning letter. Yet the situation did not give him a feeling that was entirely happy.

Raimondi filled his pipe.

“I sent a letter with her too. I wanted to thank him for having sent you here.”

Again Frank Braun laughed; he had a keen sense of the ironic comedy of the situation. What in the world would the old priest answer?

“When did she leave?” he asked.

“When? She left by the stage at eleven o'clock.”

“But the stage didn't leave today?”

“Oh, yes, today! Yesterday it went to Attola and today returned to the city. That's the reason Teresa went today; otherwise she would have to wait a whole week.”

“And so she will stay the entire week in the city?” Frank Braun asked.

The landlord shook his head.

“Certainly not,” he said. “She’ll probably stay with her aunt overnight and return on foot tomorrow. What will you drink today, sir?”

“Nothing,” Frank Braun answered.

He got up and went to the door. The landlord looked after him and laid his pipe heavily on the table.

“Nothing? Nothing at all?”

The German turned around. “No, nothing at all, my friend! I am not given to drinking often; I have the impulse once in every few years.”

“Years? Years!”

The landlord got up, grasped his chin with his bony hand and stroked it.

“Sir,” he stammered.

Frank Braun saw that he had something more to say that he found difficult to express. He went up to him.

“Well, then, what is it?”

“Why, sir,” the landlord stammered, “I believed that you would drink a couple of bottles daily—”

“I’m not thinking of such a thing,” the German interrupted him. “And I suppose that is very unpleasant for you?”

The landlord said:

“Yes, since you live here so cheaply—”

“Cheaply?” Frank Braun laughed aloud. “You call your prices cheap? Well, look here, Raimondi, it seems to me that what I pay you for board and lodging is rather considerable.”

“Yes, sir,” said the landlord. “Oh, yes—but then it isn’t only the food and lodging—”

“Isn’t it? Well, what else is there?”

Raimondi hesitated. He spat thoughtfully, filled his pipe again, opened his lips and closed them.

“Sir,” he said. “Sir,—”

“Well, what the devil is it?”

“Well, if I must say it, weren’t you with Teresa last night?”

He watched him greedily from under his lids, as if lying in wait. The German was silent for a moment, hardly knowing just what to say.

“Did the girl tell you anything?” he asked.

Raimondi shook his head with energy.

“No, oh, no, sir, she didn’t say a thing, not a thing! I heard you.”

“Is that so? So you heard me? I thought you were deaf as a post, Raimondi! I have to roar like a drill sergeant to make you understand me. In addition you were drunk last night. You heard nothing, absolutely nothing! It’s all in your imagination.”

But the landlord’s little eyes twinkled and he laughed a hoarse, dry laugh.

“No, oh, no, sir, it wasn’t my imagination. You were with the girl. Teresa screamed—how she screamed! That woke me up and I went upstairs. The door was open; the light was burning in the lamp. I saw you in her bed, I saw both of you.”

Frank Braun grasped him by the arm.

“And then, Raimondi, then you went calmly down again?”

The landlord nodded eagerly.

“Yes, sir, certainly! And you must pardon me; I wouldn’t have said a word if—if—”

The German laughed bitterly.

“If I were a more profitable guest, eh? Yes, if I were to drink a couple of bottles of wine daily? Is that it?”

“Sir,” said the landlord, “sir—”

But Frank Braun interrupted him sharply.

“Be silent, Raimondi!” he cried. “Nothing else you have to say interests me. Naturally you must not lose a proper profit. Since I don’t drink, I must make it up to you in other ways.”

He put his hand in his pocket and drew out several bills.

“Here,” he said. “Count them.”

He threw the bills on the table and went out. He read for hours before going to bed. Once again he went to the window and looked out. Wasn't she coming? But the valley slept.

"So she is mine three times over!" he murmured. "First I took her by force; then she gave herself to me; and finally her father sold her to me."

When he came down the next morning Teresa brought him his breakfast. He greeted her joyfully and grasped her arm. But she eluded him swiftly, said "Good day" softly and hurried out. He jumped up, followed her, but ran straight into her father at the door.

"So Teresa is back again?" he asked.

"Yes, for just an hour," said the old man. "She didn't see the priest."

Frank Braun asked, "She didn't see him?"

"No, he is on an inspection trip. So she left my letter and returned again at once."

"So she walked the whole night long?"

The landlord nodded:

"Oh, yes, the whole night."

Frank Braun breakfasted very slowly. He hoped that Teresa would come back into the room, but she did not come. Later he met her in the garden; she went away as he approached her. He tried several times, on this day and on the following days, to speak with her. She avoided him, almost hid herself from him. Once he tried to enter her room at night, but he found the door locked.

"Let her be," he thought.

He still desired her, but only superficially, half consciously, and at moments. Usually he forgot her. His thoughts were on his work. He sat over his books until late into the night, arranged his tracts and tables, gathered the notes and excerpts that he had made during the years. He measured and weighed, made a plan and rejected it; then formed a new plan. And he saw his work grow, take on form and substance, become plastic and concretely visible. Laughing, he called it his mastodon, now that he held Cuvier's bone in his hand.

Once he went to Mr. Peter's barn. The distant music never disturbed him. He only needed to place his ear plugs in his ears. So he had almost

forgotten the American's activity as he had Teresa's love. Once on a walk he passed there, just as they were intoning a song within. He entered, stood far back by the door and listened. They sang the fasting song:

*Bid me all thy songs to sing,
My compassion's offering bring
Lamb of God from blemish free
That took all my sins away from me!*

*Let thy sorrow bear a part
Deep in every Christian's heart,
Let Thy dying agony
A solace in my heart to be!*

They sang all seven stanzas, most of them from memory, only a few glanced at the hymnal. Frank Braun looked around him in the old barn. It was an immense place, with three walls of stone; only the front wall was made of planks. The transformation of the barn into a hall had been effected merely by breaking out the wooden ceiling which, exactly in the middle, had divided the barn into two stories, and by using these boards to hide the rough inner gable of the roof. In addition a window had been placed in a side wall which admitted a little air and light into the room. No real ecclesiastical decorations were to be seen anywhere; only against the rear wall hung a rather large crucifix.

The penitential meeting followed, in a general way, the services of the Salvation Army. They sang and prayed passionately; after which the American, whose face Frank Braun could scarcely discern in the artificial twilight, preached penitence and fighting mightily against the devil, the father of all sins. Now and then he mixed with his speech some fine phrase in monstrous English, which had obviously clung to his memory from his experience in Pennsylvania. He urged his followers to practice penitence and closed with a warm prayer.

Then he asked whether anyone in the assembly desired "to express his soul." A sturdy farmhand with a huge red goiter came forward and

“expressed his soul.” He related, stammering, that he had formerly been a frightful drunkard, that he had had only one thought, namely, wine. He had been drunk at least four times a week, and twice on Sunday. He fairly reveled in the recollections of that sinful time, exaggerated fearfully, painting himself as black as possible, in order to radiate a now whiter innocence. For now the Lord Jesus had illumined him with His grace, so that he now abominated drunkenness as the most horrible of vices, and found his sole happiness in aspirations toward the Lamb and toward the Blood of the Savior.

“I was as black as the devil in hell,” he grunted, “but now I am clean through the grace of the Redeemer. God has guarded me from every sin for three months, and will continue to do so. In other days I was full of wine; today I am full of the Holy Ghost!”

The huge fellow turned his eyes to heaven, his voice sounded clucking and hoarse and the large goiter expanded and swung to and fro. Frank Braun could not suppress a short laugh; for a moment the glances of the assembly turned toward him. But immediately thereafter the voices arose again in a fervent prayer to the Son of God. He made the observation that here, as with all fanatical sects, Jesus played the largest and almost the only part. From the minds of even these intensely Catholic hill peasants the saints seemed to have vanished, and the Holy Virgin herself was scarcely mentioned. All the songs and prayers were taken from the Catholic prayer book of the diocese of Trent, and except for the brief sermons and public confessions the American had imported no new element into the old home.

Congregational singing and prayer, a brief exhortation, then a confession—these followed each other with dull monotony. Somewhat disappointed and very much bored, Frank Braun left the hall as the assembly raised its voice for the fourth time in the fasting song. He thought that Don Vincenzo was probably right, and that these people would soon have quite enough of this mischievous nonsense. This American was hardly cut from the same wood as Father Vincenzo of Padua!

Frank Braun sat at his work. Days passed and weeks; he saw nothing, heard nothing. Sometimes he glanced through the window at the lake, and then had to remind himself where he really was. He now scarcely noticed that the girl avoided him, he talked to her as to any stranger, and only used

her, like her father or Angelo, the farmhand, when he desired some service. The sheets grew into a pile.

This is how he wanted to begin:

First to shatter all that is, to destroy the very foundations. And then, on this open field, to build a new temple. Assured of victory he hurled forth his denials. In large letters he wrote the superscription to a certain chapter: "The Latin Peoples".

In the very first sentence he cried out that the term was mere sound and fury, a ridiculous soap bubble, which burst in the air. He took up the various countries. The Pyrenean Peninsula:

A certain people had once inhabited it. Iberians? What did the name matter? Roman armies carried their language there—Roman armies that came from all the ends of the earth and were scarcely for a tenth part of Italic origin. The conquered took on the language of their conquerors. That was all. And there was a racial blending of trifling unimportance.

Then came the Goths; this time the conquerors took on the language of the conquered. And again came the Moors and Berbers and Jews from the south, Franks from the north. To the west, however, came mixed folk from all the islands and coasts to Lusitania, new mixtures again and again. Only the language remained—the language of Rome. It conquered all the conquerors.

And why did Latin take the land by storm and hold it firmly against the centuries long rule of lords, of strange idioms? Because the land had had no language before the Romans came. No common tongue—only a hundred small languages.

Exactly in the same way that the United States became English, that Mexico and the whole of South America submitted to the Spanish influence; they were a thousand tribes and all hostile to one another, a thousand languages and all strangers.

Frank Braun laid down his pen and laughed. Once, somewhere in the Bolivian Chaco, he had met a powerful anteater. The fellow stood in a clearing, erect, on a tall white ant-hill. He looked around about him, curiously, silent and without fear, then he dug in the loose sand with his front paws. It was as if he wanted to invite him to partake of this delicious meal. Swarming by the many thousands the frightened ants ran around, and

then the ant-eater protruded his long, pointed, wormlike tongue, and rolled it like a sticky snake among the fleeing insects.

“That is the Spanish tongue!” thought Frank Braun. “At one gulp it devours a hundred Indians.”

“Damn Dago!” he had cried, and sent a bullet through the beast’s head.

At the time he had hated the Spaniards. And that was how the language of Rome devoured the hundred languages of the Peninsula; only one survived, the Basque tongue of the northern mountains. And how long would it persist?—Rome’s language took root, tough and steadfast against all conquerors. To be sure, it split, was shredded and mixed; so that today the Castilian didn’t understand a word of what the Catalan said; and the Gallego fell into dull silence when the Andalusian spoke to him.

Nevertheless, Rome’s language conquered. But where were the Latin folk now? There was a people in its land who had absorbed only a little drop of Latin blood. Even as later they absorbed that much more of the Gothic and Moorish and Jewish blood. And all of those admixtures had long since sweated it out again; and the ancient folk remained, conquered and conquering, always the same. What nonsense to call them Latin!

And France—in all respects didn’t it show an analogous picture? Gaul, once conquered, accepted the language of Rome and then imposed the same language upon the conquering Goths, Burgundians, Franks and Normans. It derived its language from the conqueror, its name from the others—and yet it remained what it was.

There was Romania, the land that had both the name and the language of Rome. And yet its people had only the tiniest drop of Roman blood, less than any of the others, they had the blood of criminals, which, in the second century, the emperor Trajan had transferred to the Danube.

There remained Italy, the motherland. Greeks in the south, Gauls in the north: in between was Latium and Rome, then, the innumerable slaves from all lands and zones, and finally the Goths and Vandals, Langobards, Normans and Saracens, and always, again and again, through all the centuries, new yellow haired hordes from across the Alps. Rome’s language subdued a hundred conquerors.

But what had the language to do with the race? Less than nothing! Were the Negroes of Haiti Latin because they spoke French, or the Indians

of Mexico and Brazil because they spoke Spanish and Portuguese? Or the black drones of the United States Germanic because they chattered English?

Language was one thing and race was another. They had nothing in common! Therefore, all deductions concerning the perception of racial individuality that were based on language must necessarily be false. How good it was, he reflected, that history in the south was a trifle older. It was scarcely more than two or three wretched millennia, but old enough to utterly shatter the fable of the Latin peoples. Otherwise the folly concerning the oneness of the Latin as of the Slavic and Germanic races might persist eternally, merely because the oneness of the language was a fact.

How easy it was to blow asunder the so called Latin world, and how difficult the process was when applied to the Germanic and Slavic peoples, merely because the historical record was lacking.

Here one had scarcely any points of departure, merely tiny wedges, into the rough blocks of thick skulled hypotheses. There were the Bulgars, Ugro-Finns, who made their way into the valley of the Danube. There they mixed with the Slavic speaking people and gave the land the name of the conqueror, while they themselves assumed the language of the conquered, racial brothers of the Magyars. Yet the latter, like the Bulgars, were blended with the conquered, submerged in their folk ways; but they imposed on the conquered land both their name and their language.

He lost his way, seeking with difficulty the scattered fragments of races. In this way he took the Kutzo-Wallachians by the Pindus range, the Zinzars in Thessaly—most certainly related in race to the Mordwin-Finnish of Kazan, and yet Latin in their language, and the Laps and Kwans of Scandinavia, who spoke Swedish or Finnish and were yet neither Ugrian nor Germanic. Then the Turkish Kumanians in Hungary, and the strange Permians and Syrjanians in Vologda and Archangel.

Then he found his way back. He laid this new lance at rest, and tilted against language with a flying banner. It amused him to write a long page, in which each sentence was in another tongue. Am I now a Russian? He laughed, and now a Spaniard, and now a Highland Gael and now a Guarani Indian? He took up his arrows wherever he could find them. He forged sharp points out of a hundred trifles which he had gathered up by the wayside.

For instance, he had known a kindly college professor in Saxony. The man gave instruction in German and with sincere feeling recited the odes of Klopstock to his boys. Then, by some chance, he was transferred to a remote little town in East Prussia. His work left him a great deal of leisure and so, one fine day, he began to study Masurian. No human being today knew a single word of this language, but he asserted that the Masurians ought to know their mother tongue, and that it was, in truth, the finest language in the world. He translated Schiller, Klopstock, Ramler, Eichendorff and all the patriotic poets into Masurian.

And he really succeeded in founding a tiny political party; he ran on the ticket as the Masurian candidate and received several dozen votes. He discovered, somehow, a Masurian among the ancestors of Schiller, and, of course, among his own: as things are now he will know neither peace nor rest until all the land from the Elbe to the Dwina is Masurian. Once upon a time he was a German: now he is a Masurian, because he alone in the entire world can speak that ancient tongue. Language! That was the lion's skin of all asses!

Frank Braun thought of Herr Friedrich Wilhelm Bandmann, who was a frame maker and dwelt in his native city next to the home of his parents. He was a bachelor and a mighty patriot, even more than the college professor; he swore by Bismarck and everything the latter did. Then, when Bismarck was deposed, his blood boiled: he sold his house and his business, got drunk one last time at the veteran's club, and bidding a tearful farewell to all his comrades, went to America. The steamer landed at Hoboken, and since Herr Bandmann didn't know a single word of English, he remained in this German city and crossed the river to New York just one single time, with a safe companion. He remained there two hours and a half. But he didn't like New York any better than Hoboken: therefore he returned to Germany by the next steamer. He had been away for three weeks.

Frank Braun had met him on the street and said:

“Well, Herr Bandmann, so you are back in Germany again?”

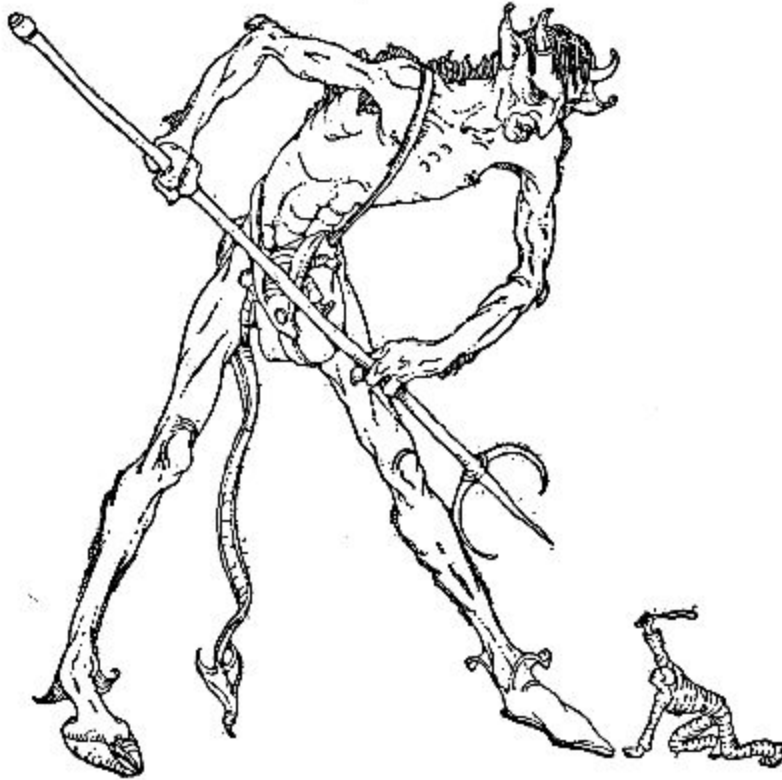
Then Herr Bandmann looked at him with astonishment and a sense of injury in his eyes, and asked:

“Shpeak you English?”

He had become an American.

And Frank Braun wrote:

“My parrot speaks just as good of German as a preacher. He is undoubtedly of Germanic blood.”





Chapter Four

*“Confused soul from Golgotha Satan
is Good, Héloise is there!”*

-G. Carducci, Hymn to Satan



Teresa knelt on a little confessional footstool; her forehead lay in her folded hands. Her eyes were shut tight; she did not see the old priest who sat in his armchair before her. And she was telling him—Her words came in a quiet steady calm without a pause, without resonance.

How patiently the old man listened, without interrupting her. His eyes wandered around the walls of his room, and clung finally to a small gold framed picture which represented, clumsily but colorfully enough, his native Val di Scodra. He saw the round lake deep in the valley, and saw the brown roofs that clung to the green of the slope like patches of rusty moss. He sighed. How long ago it had been since he had climbed around there with his yellow goat! And now this German had settled down there—this German whom he himself had sent there, and who had now taken his poor little penitent, and—

Teresa fell silent. Slowly she raised her head and looked at him—helplessly, deeply questioning. The old man saw her eyes, so large and blue, gleam under her lashes. Wasn't she a German too? He thought of her mother: a teacher's child, one of seventeen. She was probably happy enough when Raimondi, a sergeant-major of the Imperial Rifles, asked for her hand. But then, immediately after their marriage, his parents died; he asked for his discharge and moved with his young wife to Val di Scodra. Wasn't it truly a grave which he had brought her into? She was alone, didn't have a soul with whom she could really communicate—not one. It had not been the language, however, which cut her off from the folk of the valley, she learned that quickly enough. It was her bit of education, tiny as it was, which nevertheless separated her so thoroughly from these mere beasts of

the mountains, made her seem a stranger, an interloper, whom they all hated.

Nothing remained but to help her little daughter Teresa. She dedicated fourteen years of her life to her—a life passed quietly and humbly, in a constant, melancholy yearning that no longer knew any hope. She lost her bloom swiftly and faded, and that which died many years later was only a pitiable shadow of the beautiful Mary of Brixen.

The minutes passed. He did not answer his penitent; he didn't know what to say. What was the girl's sin? To be sure—certainly—it was a sin. But which sin? Where did it come from? And how was he to grasp it? Again her lips moved. Her words came with infinite softness; he scarcely heard them, rather read them upon her lips:

“Your Reverence—is it true—did the Madonna send him?”

He was frightened; a light sweat came upon his forehead.

And he brooded again, “What was her sin?”

Then, swiftly, and without apparent motivation he asked a question:

“Does he often go to the American?”

“No,” said the girl.

The priest was astonished.

“No?” he repeated. “Has he never been there?”

“Oh, yes,” she answered.

“Tell me everything you know about him,” he demanded.

She spoke in her docile way:

“He went there once, in the evening; he entered the hall exactly at seven o'clock. I know it precisely, I saw him go in, for I happened to be standing by the window and looking out—”

She turned red and interrupted herself.

“No, your Reverence, no—forgive me—it didn't just happen. When he goes out, something compels me to my room and to the window. I stand there and look after him. I watch to see where he goes, how he wanders now here and now there in the valley.”

Her head drooped, her eyes remained dry, but her voice was full of tears.

“Go on!” the priest urged her.

Teresa said, “He was there scarcely an hour. Then he came back for supper. He told Father where he had been. And he said that they were all blockheads, these devil hunters, and that Father and Angelo, our man, were the only sensible people in the village, because they did not join in this mischief. That is all.”

The old man drew a deep breath. He felt as if a heavy burden had been lifted from him, as if he had been liberated from a great fear. He did not know what he feared; but this dull oppression that had tormented him for weeks now suddenly seemed gone. It seemed to him as if the evil that remained was only slight compared to the other, the unknown, which he had escaped. And he did not know yet what he was to tell the girl. Seeking for that, he began to talk to her again, and questioned her regarding all of the stranger’s doings. Patiently she answered him.

“He works all day long, and often late into the night. Then he goes for a walk. At times, too, he rows on the lake.”

The old man asked, “Does he go fishing?”

Then she said, “No, he does not go fishing. He is kind to all animals. But he torments human beings—”

She stopped, but the priest beckoned her to continue.

“When he sees a caterpillar in the road he picks it up and carries it into the grass so that no foot may crush it. He scolded me because I brushed a cobweb from his window, and he feeds the hens and the doves with his own bread. All our animals follow him; the big goat climbs the stairs and goes into his room, together with our tom-cat.”

The old man smiled. He saw the face of the blond German, so young, so happy and laughing.

“He is only a big child, after all,” he thought.

The girl said, “But he beats people. Once, when Angelo harnessed the mule he saw that the straps were too tight and that the leather had irritated the animal’s sore skin. Then a rage came upon him, he tore the straps off and lashed them across the man’s face.”

“He did right,” said the priest.

The girl raised her eyes; this slight assent strengthened her, filled her with a happy and silent assurance. Then, doubting again, she let her head sink.

“And he struck me, too,” she murmured.

“You, too?” the priest asked swiftly.

“Yes,” she said in a toneless voice. “Otherwise he does not notice me at all, scarcely sees me, and doesn’t even know when I am present. But one morning, when he was at breakfast, I came into the guest room. I had caught a mouse in the trap; I took it out and threw it to the tom-cat. Then he jumped up and struck me in the face. Then he forced the tomcat to release the mouse and let it escape.”

The old man asked, “And what did you do?”

She looked at him in astonishment. “I?—Nothing. He cried out and scolded me. He said if there were mice around, the cat might catch as many as it chose, that was its business. And, if I were to catch any in the trap, I might drown them, or beat them to death. But I was not to torment animals needlessly. He asked me whether I understood. And since I gave no answer, he grasped my hands and pressed them together until I thought my bones would break. I was determined not to cry out, but I sank down on my knees before him. He would not desist until I promised him never again to give a mouse to the cat.”

“And have you kept the promise?” asked the old man.

“Yes,” said the girl quickly. “I had to swear it by the Madonna.”

She stopped again, seeking for words. After a while she continued:

“Then he let me go and I went out. But I heard how he talked to himself—as he often does, your Reverence. And then he said something strange, something that I did not understand. And it was as if he said it to me, although I was no longer in the room.

He said softly, ‘You may torture, but not needlessly. To torture is well. It is an art—perhaps the greatest of them all. But men are like beasts of the field: they torture without knowing it.’

That’s what he said.”

She fell silent; her eyes sought an answer. But the old priest did not speak. Again he saw the stranger’s face, but this time it had an immobile

expression which fascinated and frightened him.

She rose and approached him.

“What am I to do?” she asked.

But the old man shook his head.

“I don’t know,” he murmured.

Then she threw herself on her knees at his feet and pillowed her head upon his lap. She sobbed and he felt her tears moistening his robe. He wanted to help her and didn’t know how. Silently he laid his hand upon her head and gently stroked her locks. Suddenly she arose and grasped his hand. Her breath flew and he felt the passionate pressure of her fingers.

“Your Reverence,” she cried, “is it true?—did the Madonna send him?”

And in her eyes there gleamed her wish and her longing and an ardent beseeching for his “Yes.”

He felt it clearly. And he saw in her eyes the stranger’s third image: that of a youth, aglow with dreams, ready to scale all peaks. And he knew that this image filled her whole soul. Almost by force the word she wanted seemed about to be wrung from his lips. But he mastered himself, turned his eyes away and said:

“I don’t know.”

He heard her deep sigh and her pain stabbed him as if it were his own. Her fingers relaxed for a moment, only to cling once more to his own in a convulsive grasp.

“Your Reverence,” she stammered, “Your Reverence! Or else—else —”

She broke off, but he understood her question well. What power had sent this stranger? The Madonna—or—? And helplessly, as barren of counsel as the girl herself, he answered once again:

“I don’t know.”

She broke down completely and fell across his knees. A sobbing came upon her and shook her poor body; it seemed to the priest as if she would break to pieces there at his feet. An infinite compassion came over him; he took her head and drew her up.

“Do you love him so much?” he asked kindly.

Then she breathed:

“Yes, Father, more than my life.”

He kissed her forehead gently.

“Then go, my child, take your fate upon you. It is the hand of God.”

She looked at him gratefully, incapable of uttering a word. Then she covered his hands with tears and fervent kisses.

Frank Braun came downstairs late. He had worked until dawn. He breakfasted, then, lost in thought, looked out the window. Teresa served him; she stood silently beside him, awaiting his look. But he scarcely saw her. He had not noticed that she had been gone, and did not notice now that she had returned. He ate quickly and got up. That evening and on the next day she continued to stand beside him as he ate. She did not dare to address him, but served him as silently as a slave.

Once she said softly:

“I am to give you the priest’s regards.”

He looked up, “What priest?”

“Don Vincenzo,” she said.

He nodded indifferently, “Ah, yes. Thank you.”

His thoughts were far away. Only after a while did the meaning of her words strike him. He looked at her—and saw that she was beautiful.

“So you went to see your confessor?” he asked.

She did not lower her eyes, but answered his look.

“Yes, I was in the city four days ago.”

He asked, “Did you confess?”

She nodded. Then, very softly:

“He said it was the hand of God.”

Frank Braun laughed.

“Is that so? Did he say that? He too?”

He patted her lightly on the cheek and went out. Now he chatted with her at times, but he did not touch her. He was friendly and kind to her, as to a comely lad whose presence he liked. Sometimes, when he played his lute,

he called her. Then he let her sit by him and listen. Or he went into the boat and gave her the oars. She rowed and sat there silently in front of him, thinking and dreaming over the water. And he grew accustomed to having her run beside him on his walks, as patiently and attentively as a well-trained dog.

One evening, as they were sitting together in the boat, it occurred to him that she could speak German. The thought made him happy, for he felt the need of speaking to someone concerning his work. And since he thought in German it was more pleasant to speak to her in that language, rather than in her own, for then he was more aware that she did not understand him. Now he told her everything he thought. He asked her advice, but at once supplied the answer himself. That helped him to see more clearly, more incisively—to speak out loud to her that way.

Earnestly, patiently, Teresa listened to him for hours. She understood very little of all that he said, but his words seemed miraculous to her. She sat before him and was silent, happy and blessed in the feeling that her master was speaking to her.

Frank Braun did not count the days. Spring departed and summer lay in the valley. He saw that well. He went with the girl through the fields, and felt that there was something common between him and these people who tilled the land. Their hands scattered the seed, harrowed and ploughed, creating all that was to grow. And that was how his work grew too. He was cheerful and happy in the virile power of his creative activity, and on his soil let the fruits ripen in the sun.

Sometimes, by day, when the girl was in the garden, or far out on the lake, he called the white goat or the tom-cat to him. Neither had a name, but he had christened the goat Marfa and the tom-cat Fritzi. And the animals responded to these names, hurried up the stairs when he called, and thumped at the door. Then he let them into the room, sat down and read to them.

But the goat gave him no rest, pushed him gently and sniffed at the pocket in which he carried sugar.

“Get out, Marfa,” he said. “You take no interest in racial questions or ethnological problems.”

Or again, in the middle of the night, he went over to Teresa. He woke her up, sat down at the edge of the bed and talked to her. She listened, as always, in earnest silence. Then he went away again. Sometimes, too, he stayed and, laughing, took her in his arms. And she closed her eyes and trembled with happiness.

One evening there was a knocking at his door. Angelo, the farmhand, stumbled in, gasping, almost bursting with an important message. Would the gentleman come down to the village to the house of Mariano Venier. His wife, Matilda, was very ill and about to die. And would not the doctor come at once.

“I am not a physician,” said Frank Braun.

But the man did not budge. Frank Braun repeated that he had no skill in that art and could not help. Then Angelo shrugged his shoulders resignedly, as if to say:

“Well, it’s none of my business.”

He turned around and growled, “I’m not from hereabouts.”

From below Frank Braun heard loud and hurried talk. Immediately after that the landlord entered his room and Teresa was with him.

Raimondi said, “Venier is downstairs and refuses to go! Please go to his wife, sir!”

“But what am I to do there?” cried the German. “I tell you I’m not a physician!”

Raimondi nodded politely.

“But you are a doctor, aren’t you?” he said.

“Certainly!” exclaimed Frank Braun. “But I am not a doctor of medicine. I can’t help the woman I tell you.”

The landlord nodded again, scratched his chin and spat.

“Of course not!” he agreed. “But these people aren’t going to believe it. They think that because you are a doctor you must be able to cure them.”

And his own aspect betrayed the fact that he himself thoroughly shared their opinion, and that it would vex him greatly if the strange doctor who lodged with him were not to go. He took a new start:

“Now the American has gone and is going to pray her well again. I’m sure you can do as much good as he!”

But Frank Braun did not feel the slightest ambition to compete with the American.

“No,” he said, “I have neither the time nor am I in the mood for such folly.”

Then the girl approached him.

“Please go to the poor woman,” she begged. “Perhaps you can help her, after all.”

He laughed, “But, child, I assure you that I can’t do anything at all.”

She was quite serious and looked at him with her large eyes.

“Surely,” she insisted. “You can do anything!”

She grasped his arm.

“I beg of you to go to the poor woman!”

He sighed. Shrugging his shoulders he opened a drawer and took out a few vials and pill boxes: laudanum, quinine, pyramidon—whatever he happened to have. Triumphantly the landlord watched him and escorted him down the stairs.

“The doctor is coming!” he called out to the peasant.

The latter was a dirty, stunted, black haired fellow, with a low forehead and an incipient goiter. Hastily he ran ahead and Frank Braun followed with long strides. Venier led him to his house, then through the hall into the bedroom. Many people were there, all praying aloud. He recognized the huge farmhand with the red goiter, and also Sibylla, the crooked old beggar from the road.

“So you have grown pious, too?” he thought.

When he entered they interrupted their singing; swiftly he stepped to the bed. The air in the room was heavy to the point of suffocation.

“Open the window,” he commanded.

Venier went to the window. But his wife sat up in bed.

“No!” she cried. “Leave it closed! Pietro Nosclere says that it must remain shut!”

Frank Braun turned to one side. The American stood next to him. He was dressed in black and wore a long coat which was closed tight at the neck, like the coat of a domestic missionary. His face was beardless; his eyes, which were small, piercing and lay deep in their hollows, squinted a little. His forehead was bulging; there was almost no chin, his nose seemed flattened out. In contrast, his large ears, if grown tight by their lobes, protruded hugely on both sides. Old scrofulous scars ran across his neck, his movements were hasty and almost epileptic.

Frank Braun thought:

“I could much more easily diagnose him than the sick woman.”

“Let me take your pulse,” he said.

But the woman hid her arm under the bedclothes and looked at him, her eyes full of hatred. He turned to the peasant, glad of a reason for going.

“You see your wife doesn’t want me,” he continued. “How can I help, then?”

At this point the American said, “Give him your hand, sister.”

Obediently she lifted her arm. He felt her pulse, and saw that she had a high fever. He asked for a candle in order to see better in the semi-darkness. Then he asked her to open her mouth. Her tongue and her entire mouth were badly inflamed. She coughed and rattled.

“She is certainly ill,” he thought. “That much is certain!”

He had no idea what ailed her, and considered what he was to do.

“How long since she’s slept?” he asked hesitatingly.

The American answered, “Three nights ago. And since yesterday we have been here praying with her. If Jesus is willing, he will heal our sister. All healing comes from the Blood of the Lamb.”

“Certainly,” Frank Braun nodded. He thought:

“In any event it can do her no harm to have a good sleep; I’ll give her a little opium.”

“Water!” he cried. “I will give her some medicine.”

The woman cried out and struggled with her hands.

“No, no, he wants to poison me!”

Then she began to sing aloud and the whole company joined in.

*Sinner, behold the Lamb of God
On the cross, on the cross, on the cross,
Who took our guilt upon himself,
On the cross, on the cross, on the cross.
Oh see his blood, oh hear his cry!
That looseneth us from slavery,
From Satan's bondage set us free
On the cross, on the cross, on the cross!*

The peasant beckoned slightly with his head and Frank Braun followed him into an outer chamber. Venier took a water carafe from a shelf.

“Go and send Mr. Peter to me,” said Frank Braun.

He filled two glasses half-full of water and dropped some laudanum into each. Then the American came in.

“What do you want Doctor?” he asked.

“Here is the medicine,” said the German. “I am going away now and you must give it to the sick woman. Are you going to stay here all night?”

“Yes,” said Pietro Nosclere, “we shall watch and pray.”

“Very well, then,” Frank Braun continued. “Give her the contents of the one glass at once. She will take the medicine more willingly from you. It is to be hoped that she will feel quieter then and soon fall asleep. If she wakes up again give her the contents of the other glass. Do you understand?”

Peter nodded.

“But will you really do it?” asked the other.

The American did not answer. But it was easy to see his intention, namely, to take the glasses and pour out their contents as soon as the other had turned his back. Frank Braun was vexed. He grasped Pietro's shoulders and shook him.

“Look at me!” he commanded. “You will do what I tell you! I insist! Do you understand?”

The American murmured, "Yes, I will do it."

He took the glasses and went back to the sick woman. On the following day Frank Braun met the peasant in front of his house.

"Well, how is your wife today?" he asked.

Mariano Venier answered distrustfully, "You didn't help her. I won't pay anything."

"I didn't ask for anything," said the German. "And I don't want any money. I'd simply like to know how the patient is."

Venier grew more polite.

"She is better, sir; she will probably get well. I thank you for having come."

Swiftly he added:

"But it was the American who saved her."

Then he turned around and hurried into his house. The village was agog over the healing of Matilda Venier. People said that she had been irretrievably lost, and that even the skill of the famous German physician had been in vain. Mr. Peter had watched and prayed with her for three nights and saved her body, which had already been in the very claws of Satan.

Teresa came into his room.

"It was you who saved Matilda, wasn't it, and not the American?"

Frank Braun thought:

"I dare say she saved herself."

But he said, "It was probably the American. He prayed so nicely."

The girl did not know whether he spoke seriously.

"No, no!" she insisted.

"Oh, yes, yes!" he interrupted her. "I told you that I was no physician. Come in!" he cried, as he heard a gentle knocking at the door.

The girl opened the door. But when she saw Pietro she was frightened and ran quickly out.

The American approached. Frank Braun bade him good-day and offered him a chair. In his embarrassment Mr. Peter rubbed his large red

hands over his knees. Then stammering, he began and said that he had come to express his gratitude for the healing of the sister. The people in the village, it is true, said that he himself had saved Venier's wife, because no one had seen the doctor give him the medicine for her, he himself, however, knew better.

"I suppose you have explained it to the people?" Frank Braun asked.

"No," said Mr. Peter, "not yet. But I will do so Sunday afternoon at the meeting. I will proclaim then that it was not I, but the German physician, who saved our sister."

Frank Braun looked at him.

"You will not do that," he said quietly.

"And why not?"

Pietro moved around on his chair uneasily.

"Why not? I must tell it. It is the truth. And one should always honor the truth."

"You will not say it. I shall come and watch you. And if you say it, I shall get up and explain to all that you are lying."

The American jumped up from his chair, but Frank Braun took him by the arm and pushed him back down again.

"Keep your seat." He went on, "You need to understand me—it was not I who healed the wife of Mariano Venier, it was you!"

Pietro grasped his head with both hands.

"I?" he stammered. "I? But it was you who gave the medicine!"

Frank Braun lied.

"No, I gave her clear water. I am no physician. I can heal no one. You alone healed the sick woman—you and your prayer. It is to you that Jesus gives the power of His grace, not to me!"

Pietro turned his hat in his hands. He brooded painfully; thoughts defined themselves very slowly in his brain. Frank Braun repeated all that he had said once more and with emphasis. Only then, only then did the man grasp his meaning. He arose, his eyes glowed.

"Doctor," he asked, "is that really true?"

Frank Braun took the outstretched hand and shook it heartily.

“Yes! That is really true!”

And he thought:

“Why shouldn’t I lie, if it gives him so much pleasure?”

A strange delight tickled him, as he regarded the American. The latter’s chest heaved, he stretched his narrow shoulders, it seemed as if he were growing, moment by moment. He stretched out his hand, half opened his lips, as if he were about to address his congregation.

Frank Braun thought:

“You ought to be grateful to me, old boy. It is only now that you are beginning to believe in yourself.”

He led him to the door: the American walked falteringly, uncertainly, almost as one intoxicated. On his thin, bloodless lips lay a proud, triumphant smile. But it vanished the moment he looked at the other and became conscious of his existence. He did not doubt himself, but with this great faith in himself he gained yet another faith—namely, in the superior power of the stranger.

Humbly he said, “I thank you, Doctor.”

Frank Braun answered, “You have nothing to thank me for. Someday soon I am coming to one of your meetings.”

He waved his hand, “Farewell, Elijah.”

Pietro opened the door and bowed.

Suddenly he stopped and asked, stammering, “Sir, why do you call me—Elijah?”

Frank Braun thought:

“You repulsive fool! Don’t you really feel yourself to be a prophet?”

And he said, “Go now. I will tell you another time.”

Pietro had scarcely left the house when Teresa reentered the room. She seemed excited, her cheeks burned.

Breathlessly she asked, “What did he say? Why did he come?”

Frank Braun answered, “How does it concern you? He came to me and not to you.”

But she trembled and gasped.

“I don’t want him to come here! He shall not come!”

She came close to him and grasped his arm. He looked at her sharply and she trembled and pulled herself together.

Gently, as if excusing herself, she said, “He has the evil eye.”

Frank Braun drew her to him, and placed her lightly on his knee. She wanted to speak but he motioned her to be silent. He pressed her head against his shoulder then he swiftly passed his hands over her temples. She did not resist, but lay quietly breathing against his breast. He held her with his left hand, while he made soothing passes with his right hand. He observed her closely; his glance melted into hers.

Then suddenly the gentle twitching of her lids ceased, the conjunctiva became slightly enlarged and her eyes stood wide open. He nodded in satisfaction. He put her on her feet: she remained standing on the spot. He arose, took her arm and then her hand. All her limbs showed great flexibility, automatically went through such gestures as he desired, or remained stiff in the position which he gave them. Large tears rolled from the eyes of the cataleptic girl. He drove a needle into her arm with some violence; her face showed no expression of pain. That was enough for him; he had little desire for repeated experiments. Swiftly he closed both of her eyelids with his finger.

Her eyes opened and then closed again: opened once more and finally remained half open. The eyeballs were convulsively turned upward; the lids were fluttering with vibrant motion. Her head hung down far over her bosom; a subdued sobbing noise issued from her glottis. He raised her arm; it fell back like lead. He took her elbow, sought the nerve-center and pressed heavily on it. Immediately the muscles which this nerve served, contracted violently and her hand assumed a claw like shape.

“Lethargy,” he murmured. “Go ahead, my child—it is not well to have a will of one’s own.”

He pressed her back into the chair, then sat down on the table in front of her and lit a cigarette. He looked at her, smoked and thought deeply.

“How strange it is,” he thought. “Doesn’t it look as if I am the sorcerer? And yet I know very well that it is not I who have the power, but you, my child! And if I were ever to accomplish anything with either that fool, that American, whom you dislike, or with yourself, it will always be

your power or his that brings it about and not mine! I can think, but you people can achieve it!

Science asserts that you are both ill and therefore pitiable, and science is probably right. It would heal you if it could. But I am no physician and I would not heal you. Your disease is a source of power which I will use if I can.”

He sighed and threw the cigarette out of the open window.

“That is to say,” he continued, “if I feel like it. Who knows whether either one of you will interest me tomorrow? Perhaps it’s not worth one’s trouble to make such puppets dance—who can tell? Perhaps you’re only stupid, commonplace, hysterical fodder for the clinics of curious physicians! For, you see, my child, on that stage where I am master there is no room for the trivial! The actions must be tragic and fatal and significant!”

He pointed with his finger through the window to the village and the lake.

“Look over there, little puppet,” he cried. “There is your stage! Will you dance? A line dance together with your Mr. Peter? The whole village will be your chorus.”

He laughed aloud.

“Ah, it will become a fine play. For I am no physician, thank heaven; I am a charlatan. But only a charlatan can work miracles.”

He fell silent and went up to her.

“Come, my child,” he said. “We will go one step further.”

He laid his right hand on her head, stroked it with his index finger and created a gentle stimulation. After a few moments her eyes were entirely closed, she drew a deep breath and her lethargy vanished. He made several experiments, more as a matter of habit than to convince himself of the appearance of the third phase of her sleep. He ascertained the fact that by means of a gentle stimulation of the skin the muscles of the somnambulist contracted, and relaxed again just as easily through the same motion. He addressed her, gave her a few commands; she answered softly and immediately executed whatever he desired. But this ceased to amuse him, and he thought of waking her up again. And quite superficially, without any real faith in its success, he made one further experiment.

He commanded her to open her eyes wide. And suddenly, without any transition, he put his face quite close to hers, gazing at her straight and piercingly. Her cheeks flushed, all her blood rose to her head. Her pupils were remarkably dilated. He grasped her hand, without lowering his gaze, and took her pulse—a hundred and twenty-five beats. And now she clung to his glance. He walked backward; the girl followed him, her head stretched forward, her shoulders drawn up and her arms hanging limp beside her body. Her face seemed strangely empty, her features immobile. Her eyes were fixed, not a fiber of her body quivered, not a word issued from the harshly closed lips. Her expression was stony, and just one thought arose in her brain: not to lose this gleaming point—his eyes—even if it were to cost the world.

And that was the success of the experiment: the girl knew what was happening to her. Her consciousness was excessively clear; the smallest movement was stamped upon her brain. He strode up to her, pinched her arm, took a sharp knife from the table and pricked her twice and three times so that the blood flowed brightly. She saw it and knew what he was doing, but she felt no pain and it was not unpleasant to her. She did not even feel fear—she hung upon his eyes, immovable, fixed, as a little bird upon the eyes of a snake.

Frank Braun still held her with his eyes. But now his expression became happy, quietly smiling, a great joy like exquisite warmth seemed to arise in him.

“Her trance!” he murmured. “Oh, the girl is splendid—she is splendid!”

He took her head in his arms and gently blew on her eyes. She awakened at once. The fixed expression was lost, all her mobility returned. She seemed astonished and confused but not fearful.

“What did you do with me?” she asked.

He answered, “You know.”

Then he lifted her arm and kissed away the blood from the wounds.

“Did it hurt?” he asked.

She smiled, “No, not at all! But why did you do it?”

“Why?” he laughed. “Why? I don’t know. And if I knew and were to tell you, you would not understand it anyhow. May I do anything I please

with you?”

She kissed both of his hands.

“Certainly,” she said, “you may do anything that you desire.”

He thought:

“How touching! With your kind permission and your father’s and your father confessor’s! Well, I didn’t get your permission this time until after the feast!”

But aloud he said, “Thank you, it’s very dear of you. Someday soon we will go to one of the American’s meetings.”

She lowered her eyes and made no answer. Her breasts rose and fell and he saw how she struggled.

Finally she said quietly, “Yes.”

“You still have a trace of will left, haven’t you?” he asked softly. “Come here my child.”

He drew her to him and lightly passed his hand over her head and face, her shoulders, arms and breasts. He stroked her gently here and there, seeking a spot highly sensitive to hypnotic stimulation. Finally he found one at the base of the cushion of her left thumb. He pressed the spot lightly and the girl at once fell asleep. But immediately he blew upon her and awakened her again.

“Now she is my slave,” he thought.

“Listen, I’m terribly hungry!” he said. “Aren’t we going to have anything to eat this evening?”

“Of course we are,” she cried. “I’ll hurry to the kitchen right away! Everything will be ready in a moment.”

“Hurry then,” he said, “and then we’ll take the boat and go out on the lake. You are to row, and I will tell you stories. Do you want to?”

She fell upon his neck.

“Do I want to!”

He kissed her gently, “But I’m not going to tell you all that confusing stuff about my work. I’ll tell you a real fairytale.”

And the girl cried out in her joy, “Yes—yes! A fairytale! A fairytale!”

He stepped to the window and saw her hurrying to the garden to pick strawberries. Then a boy came running up to her and in both hands brought her great bunches of white currant twigs. He recognized him; it was the small boy whom he had seen on that first day when he had arrived in the valley.

He beckoned to him and asked, "What's your name?"

Teresa looked up.

"He doesn't understand," she said. "His name is Gino: he is deaf and dumb."

She stroked his cheek and made signs to him with her fingers; then the boy looked up at the window, blushed and bowed in awkward embarrassment.

Frank Braun asked, "Is he your protégé?"

The girl nodded, "Yes, he is. He is a parish child and has neither father nor mother; no one pays any attention to him."

Again she made signs to him with her hands; his emaciated face beamed and he ran quickly to the kitchen. The German descended the stairs. He threw a glance into the kitchen. The little fellow lay there on the floor beside the hearth and the kindling wood. The farmhand entered, took a heavy basket from his shoulders and threw the heavy wood from it onto the floor. Marfa, the goat, followed him.

"Hey, Angelo!" Frank Braun called out to him. "How is Venier's wife?"

The fellow stood still and pulled his shoulders up; a broad imbecile grin settled down over his face, as always. Frank Braun saw this stupid laugh—wasn't it possible, just once, to throw this eternal, dull equanimity out of gear? A mood of childlike wantonness overcame him. He leaped down the stone steps and turned somersaults in front of the house like a maddened top. Then he pulled the grinning fellow out of doors, stood him up and jumped over him. Finally he stood on his head, ran up and down on his hands, and sang and roared like one possessed.

Teresa came back from the garden with a basket of strawberries in her hand; for a moment she stared in astonishment at his wild activity; then she cried out with delight and sat down on the stone bench laughing. The boy Gino looked out of the door, his black eyes sparkled; he clapped his hands

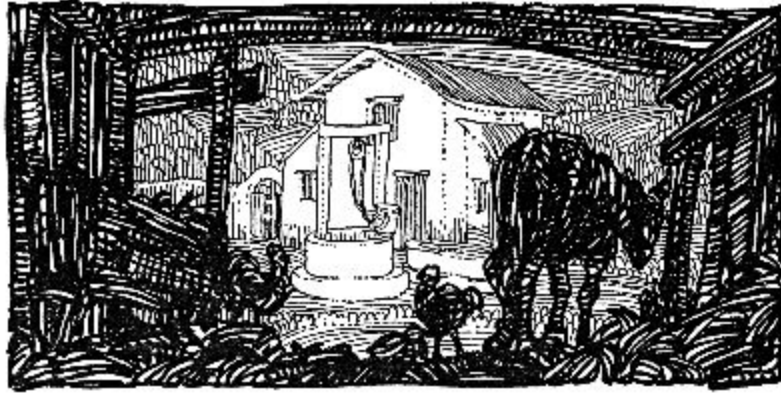
for joy. But the farmhand stood speechless and stupid as a huge block of wood and didn't move. Frank Braun sprang to his feet and turned a mighty somersault that landed him close to Angelo.

“Well, Angelo,” he cried, “how do you like that?”

The man grinned sheepishly.

“Sir,” he stammered, “I'm not from hereabouts!”





Chapter

Five

“Things exist—because we see them.”

-Oscar Wilde: Decline of the lie



The girl loosened the rope from the pier, sat down in the boat and took the oars. The German grasped the rudder and steered straight for the middle of the lake.

“All hands!” he called.

She laughed and pulled hard. She was strong and the boat glided straight across the lake, straight toward the western shore. He steered a fine curve so that they turned close under the cliffs and had to watch out sharply, the oar touched the water scarcely an inch away from the rock. In this way he urged her around the entire lake, close to the shore. They circled it for a second time. She grew warm, pulled up her sleeves and unbuttoned her blouse. Her muscles were tense and she pulled with all her might. But her eyes gleamed with pride when he praised her.

Among the reeds he had her place the oars in the boat. They lay quietly under the overhanging willows, the long branches of which built a dense shelter around them. The moon climbed above the mountains in the west and threw a hundred dancing silver flecks through the leaves. Behind them

the Fiave leapt in long bounds from the cliff side, its roaring wrapped them as if in a great, gray cloak.

The girl left her seat and nestled at his feet. She threw her braids behind her and looked up at him.

“Tell me!” she begged, “Tell me the fairytale!”

“The fairytale?” he asked slowly. “Ah, it’s a sad story.”

His hand rested on her head and yet he did not feel her. He peered through the branches at the bright, quiet lake—and up at the moon. He felt very secure in his lonely hiding place in the Scodra valley, completely surrounded by mountains that reached to the heavens, well protected by the sky piercing hills. And he felt even more hidden in this green grotto—far from all life. Here he was safe from all men and no enemy could find him in this obscure corner. Here he was alone. Not entirely alone. No. But who was with him? There was someone who loved him, and gave his existence a calm and glad repose, Marfa, the goat, or the tom-cat, or even Teresa, any one of them. Each assuredly was a fragment of nature itself—so that the name of each did not matter. He only felt it. Something was there that had life and breath, that was strange and yet his very own, belonged to him. That was what he needed—a dumb thing which he could “speak” to.

He knew it well, this feeling that was peculiar to all men—this great yearning for confession. Pious folk have an easy time, he thought, and go to their priest. And those who are not pious choose a confessor, too; they go to a mistress or a faithful friend who must hear them and absolve them. But he had neither a friend nor a mistress. Once upon a time he had had a poodle, and he had related many things to this animal’s large eyes. When it licked his hands, when it wagged its tail, then he felt absolved. But his poodle was dead.

He stroked Teresa as if she were a faithful dog. It seemed to him as if he were lying at home, as in the old days when he went to school. He used to lie on the soft skins in front of the fireplace in the evening twilight, when there was no one in the large house except himself and the black dog.

“Come, Ali, come,” he would say. “It’s so long since I’ve talked with you! Come, I have so much to tell you.”

The girl crouched quietly at his feet and did not move.

He spoke, “You see, my good Ali, it happened again. Do you remember how we went walking one evening last week, down by the castle? Then Thekla came! No, no, you didn’t know it; you were down in the garden chasing the ducks. Always after the ducks! Yesterday the police brought in a ticket once again! And we had to pay ten marks because it was the third time this autumn. Mother is angry and says she won’t pay it and I must get rid of you. But she will pay it, in the end, and I won’t get rid of you. Furthermore, what would it matter if we did get rid of you? You would just turn up again the next day.

Yes, you are well off! You don’t behave in the least like a well-bred dog. You ruin the flowerbeds and chase the ducks and tear the trousers of people whom you don’t like. You dirty the whole house, so that we can’t lay carpets on the stairs any longer. Twice a day the maids have to scrub the whole place on your account, and they need hours to keep you clean, you little pig! If I want two pairs of freshly polished boots a day, they grumble; but do any of them ever complain of the work that you cause them? They are proud if you condescend to enter the kitchen occasionally or accompany one of them a few blocks on the street. Yes, beat time with your tail! I know very well that that is your way of laughing out at me.

Come, be good, Ali! Tell me how you succeed in making all the people kind to you? For look, no one is kind to me, no one. They all torment me. They tread on me. They strike me.

Listen:

. . . So Thekla came along the moat of the old castle. I grew red and was embarrassed. I am always embarrassed. And why, dear dog? Why? Why do I always have this horrible feeling? If I want to buy a notebook, I stand at the shop window for fifteen minutes and dare not go in. I am embarrassed—if there’s company at home I don’t come out of my room. I am embarrassed.

And why? Why? I weep with rage and bite my handkerchief and it avails nothing . . . Thekla came. I was embarrassed, grew red and did not greet her. Then I followed her and tried to speak to her. She walked slowly and at the corner she waited a little. But I turned back and did not speak to her. I was embarrassed.

At home I wrote to her. Or rather, I intended to write to her. But nothing came of it; I was embarrassed to say that I was so embarrassed. So

it came to pass that I wrote a poem. I copied it and sent it to her . . . And do you know, Ali, what she did? She gave it to her aunt! And her aunt sent it to my professor of mathematics, and he handed it to the director of the gymnasium. Now I am condemned to two hours' imprisonment this Saturday and they will end by telling my mother, and that is the worst part. That, you see, is what happened.

Now tell me, what did I do to make them all so bad to me? If Thekla did not like my poem, why didn't she tear it up? And her aunt—why didn't she summon me? She comes to our house often enough! I would have gladly promised her to never write a poem for Thekla again. But no, she sent it to the gymnasium! If she had only given it to the professor of German or the professor of Greek—she knows them too! They would have both laughed and merely administered a reproof.

But no—she has to send it to that disgusting professor of mathematics! And do you know why? Because she knows very well that I have no ability in mathematics, and that the stupid fellow can't endure me. That's why! And he, of course, had to raise a great hue and cry and run to the director. And what did I do? I didn't greet Thekla, that is true. But she knows very well that I would gladly have done so, and spoken to her too, and a great deal more. And then I wrote a poem for her. Surely that's nothing bad either! I wrote it because I am fond of her and because I wanted to beg her pardon.

'That was very improper', said the director.

If I write poems at all, he said, there must, in the first place, be nothing about girls in them. Now I ask you, Ali, what else is there to put in them? I can't write her a ballad about giants and knights! What would that have had to do with my not having greeted her and desiring to excuse myself!

'And in the second place', he said, 'a poem of that kind should by no means be sent to anyone.'

But surely all the poets send their verses to those to whom they are addressed. One can't possibly let them lie around until one has enough for a book!

No, I didn't do anything wicked to Thekla. All summer long I cut roses in the garden daily. Mother scolded me because they disappeared. I sent them to her by her little brother. That's what I did. She took them all and yet

she betrayed me to her aunt. And no longer than three weeks ago I presented two of my white guinea pigs to this same old aunt, when she was visiting us. I even did a kindness once to the old professor of mathematics; he lost his handkerchief on the street the other day and I picked it up and took it to him.

Why is it then that they are all so wicked to me? Look, Ali, I am good to you, am I not? And I would like to be good to all men—but one may not be. They all do evil to me, all of them, except those who do not know me—you may well believe me, Ali, I don't know a single human being who doesn't do evil to me. Tell me how must one go about it to make them kind?"

He fell silent and his eyes looked longingly through the branches. The girl at his feet drank in his words. She didn't understand what it was all about, but his gentle, sad voice brought tears to her eyes. She looked at him and saw his blond locks fall over his forehead, his youthful lips half-open over the polished teeth. His hands rested on his knees as if they held an open book, but he gazed over it far away. He looked like a lad of fifteen, sitting there before her, lonely, left for dead out in the wide world. She felt like jumping up and pillowing his head against her bosom, she felt like a mother toward this poor boy.

"Now I am back again," said Frank Braun, "once more."

"Come here; come close to me, my good dog! Do you know why I am so fond of coming back during the holidays? To see you, my dear old fellow. Why don't I take you along to the university, like I used to do? You see, it can't be done, really not! And what is there for you out in the world? Only myself! But here you have everything and may do everything you desire and are master! Out in the world you are only—a simple dog.

There! I have brought you a collar. Look at it, there is none more beautiful in the world! It is of wrought silver and shows Diana's hunt. Ascanio of Tagliacozzo, Benvenuto's pupil, made it for a strong hound of the blonde duchess of Ferrara. Do you know who gave it to me? A beautiful and clever woman, and it means that she will never kiss me again—never again, do you understand?

It was this way, dear Ali. I was in the Palazzo Gerelli, as I was every night. When we awakened, I and the most beautiful woman in Pisa, the

yellow lamps were still burning, and at the same time a white shimmer came in through the open door from the balcony.

It is a nasty poison, the first light of the young day. It makes people bad and angry. We lay there on the broad tumbled bed; wine stood on the table in decanters and glasses, and tall dishes stood there with fruits and cakes—remnants of our evening meal, and many roses in glasses and vases and scattered on the floor and on the pillows. But my lute hung over the golden bedpost.

‘Play’, said the beautiful princess, Ginevra.

But I was tired and did not want to play; also a string of the lute had broken. The room was full of heavy air; it was as if deep shadows lay there from the fragrance of the malmsey, from the fervent roses and the fumes of the ewers of myrrh. But her naked body and all the linen exhaled the perfume called ‘Armide de Perse’, and a sultry music swept to us from those poignant embraces that were now all dead.

Her lips bled and she said, ‘Sing!’

I took the lute and placed a new string on it, and I took the Malmaison roses and put them in her hair, and green tendrils, too, and the white ‘Boules de Neige’, which bind all dreams. And I sang her the song of Lancelot and I spoke:

‘Amor, che a nullo amato amar perdona, mi prese del costui piacer’ si forte che, come vedi, ancor’ non m’abandonna’

‘The Love, which excuses no one’s beloved from loving, which seizes me in the pleasure of this man, is strong, as you see, it will never leave me.’

Then she took cherries from the dishes and wound them about her toes. And she gave me her sweet foot to kiss and I ate the cherries and kissed her toes—one cherry for each kiss— one kiss for each cherry. She laid small, blue figs on her breasts and sweet strawberries on her womb. And I kissed her breasts and her womb, and I ate the figs and the strawberries. And I drank the wine, which she offered me in her bleeding lips.

She asked me whether there was anything in the world that I loved other than Ginevra Gerelli. And I said that there was nothing left in the wide world for me to love except the body of the beautiful Ginevra Gerelli. Then she said that I was to swear it by the Virgin and by all the saints. And I swore to her by the Virgin and by all the saints that I loved nothing in the world except the sweet body of Ginevra Gerelli.

And as I thought back, it really was true, that I loved nothing in the world except this woman. Nothing, nothing at all—except you, my black pet. I laughed and told the princess that there was one other thing that I loved, my black poodle, at home, by the Rhine. She drew herself up and the poisonous light of the early day glinted in her eyes. They grew green and bitterly angry and cruel. And she said that I must go home that very day and kill the dog. I must kill you, she said. I refused. Then she wept and lamented. She lay upon my neck and begged and begged me to kill you, to kill you. And she tore herself away and said that she would go and do the deed herself.

But my senses were drunk from that night and from all her love and all the ardent fragrance. And I cried out that she must kill me first, before she could kill my black dog. She struck me and reproached me and cried out that I did not love her. I knew very well that I only needed to say one word, needed only to say that I would and she would have forgotten it all by the evening.

But I could not say it. I could not even name the act that she desired. She raged and her cry pierced my ears. Oh, I could just as well have murdered her, since she would not desist from tormenting me. Then I took a long dagger which lay on the table. I pressed its handle into her grasp and offered her my breast. Let her stab me, I cried. Then she could kill my dog too—for he would probably die of grief, if I were not to come home anymore. The Princess Ginevra lifted her arm, once, twice, she lifted her arm against my breast. And again she lifted it for a third time, against her own breast, but she did not stab.

She laughed—as one may laugh, perhaps, who has slain his mother. She sprang up from the bed and went to a cupboard. She brought out a casket which held her jewels, and took out this silver collar. She threw it to me like one tosses bread to a beggar.

She said, ‘Here boy, take this to your dog!’

And again the naked Princess Ginevra Gerelli laughed, turned away and casting no glance behind her, strode from the room.

Here, Ali, my black poodle, here is your collar. Ascanio of Tagliacozzo made it, the pupil of Cellini. Wear it, my dear animal—tears cling to it. My tears, and you love me, for I loved this beautiful woman. I do not know how other men love, but it seems that no one ever loved her better than I did. I made a temple of her body, and she drove me away. Now I am at home again, at home with you. Are you going to console me? Do you know, it is well to suffer a great pain, because it makes one forget all the little things.

Frank Braun laughed, “No, what I said is not true. You never forget, neither the greatest nor the smallest pain. They all come back; surface back up in some hour, in endless succession, all of the torments and hurts. Only the joys disappear—in the blink of an eye. But the pain remains. The human soul is a golden grail with brilliant jewels. But black worms crawl inside. They eat us up, you and me and every other human, those that have a soul. I don’t know if you have a soul, and I hope you don’t have one, my poor child.—but some bad devil gave me one, and now I have to run around with it my entire life.”

“Ali, my black poodle, had a soul, too. And his soul loved my soul. Now he is dead, and his poor soul is flitting around in the world and I am seeking it. But I never find it. I don’t know; perhaps it, too, died when my dog died. Perhaps the worms in my garden are feeding on it, just as they are feeding on his body.

Shall I tell you how he died? Once upon a time I was at home, again at home. We went out by the old castle, along the moat. A carriage came along and in it sat a good friend of mine. He stopped and we talked together. But my poodle had an aversion to the carriage and to the horses because, years before, the coachman had struck him with his whip. When we shook hands and said farewell to each other, I begged my friend to wait a moment: I wanted to take the dog by the leash. But he laughed and beckoned to the coachman and drove on. Then the poodle wildly charged the horses and barked at them. One of them stepped on him, he fell, and the carriage rolled over him.

There he lay and raised himself on his forelegs; his spine was broken. And he tried to drag his body along and looked at me. I raised him up and carried him home in my arms, half an hour’s walk. The physician came and

examined him and shook his head. He lay in my arms on the soft skins by the hearth, where he had lain so often. He did not complain and did not lament. He looked at me and licked away the tears that fell on my hands. That was how he died.

I dug him a grave in my mother's garden. A great yucca grows upon it. Sometimes I fancy that it grows deep down, with three long roots. Two penetrate the hollows of his eyes, but the third derives strength from his heart. And the powerful roots suck and drain, and my dead friend grows ever smaller and ever humbler and the great yucca ever mightier and lovelier and more splendid. And its strong staff rings with a hundred white chalice bells. And then I fancy that it is my friend.

But I cannot speak with her. The yucca is blind and evil—as all beings are that are blind. They have no soul. No, no, the yucca is not my black dog. It devoured him while he lay dead in his grave. Do you see, little girl, it looks so splendid—and yet is so evil!”

Teresa saw how his eyes gleamed. His lips contracted painfully, yet with a certain lofty yearning, and it seemed to her as if he held a half-opened crimson rose between his teeth. His arms rose gently, as if to grasp something: some great demon that was growing in the young man's soul. But he wanted to grasp it and shape it and kiss it into life. And the girl thought that she would be happy if she could be a little speck of dust in the great whirl of those dreams. He remained that way for a long time, did not speak a word and did not move. But the flame burned in his eyes, and it seemed as if it burned deep into his breast. His cheeks grew pale and thin and the girl fancied that she could see the hard bones through his skin. But the rose dropped from his teeth and fell down like a great drop of blood. Fearfully she looked away and hid her head upon his knees. She felt his fingers resting upon her locks.

Then he said, “Ali, my dear dog, I have come back. After many years I have come back. Lie down with me on the white furs—do you see the fire in the Chimney? Wait, I will throw logs on the fire. The fire devours and is insatiable. But give it more and more to eat and it will live eternally. Such a fire burns somewhere in my brain. It is insatiable.

Over the years I have been in many lands. I am a renegade, you know, and have escaped from every camp. It was always good in the beginning, and I believed in each new flag. But there were none that did not flutter in

the air for some lie. Therefore I broke my oaths—rather than become a perjurer against myself. That is everything to me. I drank with many companions and kissed many women. But the women were harlots and the companions wretched scoundrels. They took my money and ate my bread, drank my wine, and poured poison into my cup.

I sat at the feet of wise men and their wisdom was a lie. I rode into the field with merry knights and their courage was a lie. I dug in the earth with sun bronzed peasants and their industry was a lie. I partied at night with painters and poets and their art was the most impudent lie of them all. My hand grew hard from the clasp of a thousand hands and my lips were wounded by a thousand kisses. Yet each kiss and each hand clasp was only a lie in the end. Every day and every poor night the lies came. The lies even crept into my dreams.

I waded in a swamp of crimson lies and there was no firm ground anywhere. Wherever I set my feet, they broke through the crust, and I sank deeper at every step. When I went toward the evening, I became stuck in the slime; when I went toward the morning I stuck in the moorland. I sank everywhere, and there was no path anywhere that led out.

Then, when it became dark, I clung to a tree—a tree dedicated to me by myself. There was a scrap of land and the alder stood upon it, and round about me was the marsh. So I clung to the tree and listened. But something sat in the branches and sang. And I understood that there were only two things, and that one was I. But everything else—was that which was not I. And all other things were just this one thing and not a thousand things like before, just one large thing and one smaller than the other—which was I myself.

But a voice sang out from the branches:

‘We live in high joy, without enemies in a hostile world; we live without enmity under the hostility of hostile men. We live in high delight, peaceful in a world of enmity; we live in peace among men that are filled with enmity. We live in high delight, hale among the sick; we dwell among the sick without sickness. We live in high delight without desire, among those who desire; among desirous men we live without desires. We live in high delight, we that possess nothing. Joy is our food, as it is that of the radiant gods.’

I listened to the sweet words. And I felt clearly that this other thing, which was not I, did not exist at all: that it was the Nothingness. Therefore there was only one thing in the world that existed: “I” existed. And outside of me were the Nothingness and the Super—Nothingness. And again it sang through the dark night. Yet it was not another that sang, but my own heart that had become a lute like the heart of Israfel, the angel. My heart was a lute and sang. And it was a clear light and glowed into the night. And it was a red wound and out of the sweet rapture bled the great sacrifice.

And this is what the lute sang:

‘Where there is light inexhaustible, to that world where the sun sets, carry me there, as a flame, into the imperishable world of immortality, a drop of your own blood, there where all things move after delight, there in the threefold firmament, in the heavens’ threefold heaven, where the worlds of light are, let me be there eternally, a drop of your own blood, where desire and delight are, and the roseate heaven’s expanse, and the food and splendor of the gods. Let me be there eternally, a drop of your own blood, where joy and rapture, gratification and delight await us, where the desires of the one desire are attained, there let me be there eternally, a drop of your own blood.’

Thus sang the lute which was my heart and then I felt myself dissolve, for I floated in the first wave of blessedness. There was no more contradiction between the ‘I’ and the ‘Not—I’. I became one with the Nothingness. The Nothingness was the Godhead and I was the Nothingness and in the Godhead. Then, for the first time I felt the nearness of God and it was the Nothingness into which I melted. The spirit of God touched mine and conceived in me a ‘child of the ages’.

For this is the nature of God that, through all eternities, it will beget the Son. The splendor of God moved and from out of sacred springs came the second wave. And as a drop evaporates upon a sun heated stone those two mighty ones; space and time, passed into Nothingness.

There was no past and there was no future, there was only one thing—this moment. All happening sank into this huge moment. And the moment grew and embraced all times and all Space and became one flame and one tone and one wound. And the flame sang the song, and the tone dripped the blood, and the red wound flared to heaven: Then out of the Godhead of Nothingness arose the third wave, which was the great light.

Then the light arose and all things floated. There was just one radiance everywhere. It cannot be expressed, that which was, for no one who ever saw it can describe this Nothingness which is the eternal being of the Godhead.

Everything is light and radiance where the third wave is and is glorious beyond all measure. And yet it is only a wretched thing compared to the last wave, for the last wave is God himself. Not a melting into Him, no, Him growing into you and you becoming God. And whoever feels this, he is God.

But I saw how it came. Nearer and nearer, outside of me and into me and unto me from all sides—and I felt near to the breath of the highest wave.

Then many legions of gigantic glowing worms came forth out of the swamp. They burst forth and drew near, uncountable as the eternities, red, red-hot lies. And everything collapsed and the radiance scattered and everything sank into a horrible darkness, even the fiery worms.

Thus the great moment died before it was completed. The rope by which I was suspended broke, and I lay upon the ground on the damp earth under the alder tree. The red lies of the world had gnawed through the sacred rope, and perfection and all redemption died. And once again there were two hard things which repelled each other: 'I' and 'The Other'. Everything was as it had once been, and I was more wretched than I had been, now that I had seen all the heavens open wide.

I had seen—oh, only seen! For the red lies had devoured the last, the most sacred wave. Then a great hatred grew in me. I sprang up and grasped the horse that grazed by my side. I mounted the heavy, black horse and rode forward. Behind me, however, and ready to serve me, rode four mighty knights. The first bore a crown and the bow of victory and rode a white horse. The second carried a sword and rode a red horse; he destroyed all peace. The third carried a balance, the balance of severity. It was he who rode upon a black horse. But the fourth was death. And he rode a pale horse and hell flew in his cloak. Thus we rode and twenty hard hoofs stamped on the naked bodies of the dead. The four horsemen were silent, but I laughed aloud into the somber night.

That was my dream, yet it was only of life that I dreamed. But when I awoke, I greedily devoured all that was evil. And I saw that all which hell

gave forth was great and fair, even as fair as that which issued from heaven. Only that which the earth gave was neither good nor evil: it was ugly and insignificant.

But I was only a human being. I remained too unclean for the bread of heaven and yet too weak for the hot blood of hell. And I went and ate the food of men and lived their life and did their deeds. And everything that I did was rotten and decayed, and my breath stank of carrion. Then I fled once more into the silent hell and was alone with my own soul for three days and for three long nights and lay sick and torn and burnt in the poisonous rottenness. Then I vomited forth all my disgust. And then, you see, I grew to be very healthy. Now I am free. All love has died and all good hatred and there is nothing more for me in the entire world, nothing else—only you, my pet, are still alive, a weary dream out of a dead time. Like a shadow it flits past me, swift as a wind, once every hundred years.

Now I am free. All chains have fallen and all roses, and I go on my way strong and secure. A good armor lies around my heart, and the fire must burn strongly—that is to melt it. The rats have fled and I am proof against everything. I have peace and great quietude. This is the last thing that a man may achieve. I have it, for I am free.

And only rarely, rarely, does slain desire raise its wounded head. I let it speak and sing, and I think that it is speaking to a stranger, to one who is long dead—but not to me. Its strange song, which I scarcely understand any longer, only makes me sad.

Ali, you are my dear friend. You are my soul and my yearning. You are that which remains to me of all my slain happiness. Come, give me your paw, and let me stroke your black locks, my old friend. Are you cold? I will throw new logs upon the fire.

Believe me, it was a bitter struggle. But none slew me, and here I sit and my eyes fly through the distance. Only the old wounds bleed and burn —”

His voice died, his lips were set closely and tightly. The girl looked up at him, and he seemed taller and far older. He sat very erect, his head thrown back, his eyes peering sharply, straight ahead. His face was pale and his features bitter and hard. She was frightened and it seemed to her as if he were holding a naked sword with both hands upon his knees.

Then she saw how his lips twitched, and she saw how his eyes grew dim and how two tears stole slowly over his hollow cheeks. They dropped down, and it seemed to her as if they leaped as sharply as glowing needles into her heart. She sobbed aloud, grasped his hand and buried her head in his lap. And gently and softly, like a faithful dog, she licked his hand.

He marked it well; he trembled and wanted to withdraw his hand. But it seemed so dear and sweet; nothing seemed as beautiful as this gentle caress of days long past.

“Ali, my old friend!” he whispered—“My dear, dear girl!”

He raised her up and caressed her cheeks.

“You are very good,” he said.

He looked at her eyes and saw that she had been weeping.

“But why do you weep for me? It is true; one should not tell such sad stories. I will sing, that is much better. Give me the lute.”

He kissed her gently, and then he had her row out from among the willows far into the lake and into the moon light. He beckoned her to draw in the oars; then he sang out into the blue night, half aloud, dreamily, songs of yearning, such as the girl loved. He sang for her and she knew it well. A gentle wind carried them across the lake. He sang and looked at her and saw that she was happy.

Her face, which had just been illumined by the full moon, suddenly passed into a shadow, while her outstretched, folded hands still gleamed in the bright light. In the next moment her face was illuminated again, but the shadow that had fallen on her now flitted over him, left the boat, darted across the water and then remained lying, in all its length and breadth, almost in the middle of the lake. Frank Braun looked up astonished. The moon hung over the ridge to the north; its light fell diagonally on the lake, across the steep, overhanging promontory which bore the three crosses.

“It is the shadow of the image of Christ,” he thought.

But he was mistaken. The crosses stood close to the mountain wall and had long since sunk into deep shadow. Then the girl grasped his arm and pointed with her hand to the promontory:

“There, there,” she whispered. “Look over there!”

He followed her gaze and saw, close by the outermost edge, a strange figure. It seemed black, and its outline was sharply defined against the wall. It remained standing for a moment, and then glided onward, always along the extreme edge of the promontory, silently, step by step.

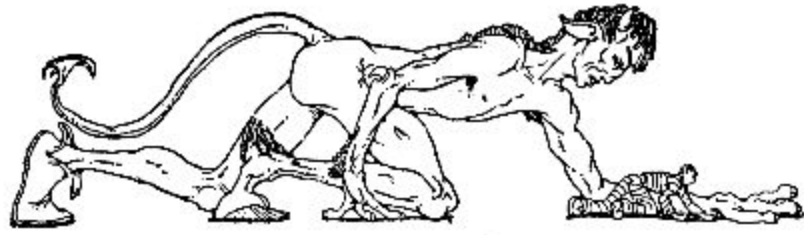
“Row over there!” he commanded. The girl grasped the oars mechanically, accustomed to obey his word. But her arms refused their service and trembled with fear. Frank Braun pushed her away and took the oars himself. She crouched before him, clasping his knees. With swift strokes he propelled the boat forward, seeking, as much as possible, to avoid making any noise.

“It’s the American!” Teresa whispered.

Frank Braun turned the boat and looked up. Yes, it was Mr. Peter. He stood near the abyss with wide open eyes. His lips moved, his arms rose and fell, as if he were making an address. His face seemed stony, immobile, and not a word issued from his mouth. Frank Braun felt the girl nestle close to him. She quivered with fear, moaned and sobbed. He saw her lips open as if to utter a cry of fear. Swiftly he closed her mouth with his hand.

“Be still, be still!” he whispered. “Don’t you see that he is walking in his sleep? You will awaken him and he will fall to his death!”

But it was too late. The cry was wrung from her breast in piercing torment and resounded in the valley on all sides. Liberated and relieved, yet frightened by her own action, she pressed herself still closer to him and fastened her teeth into his coat. The American did not move; his ears, alive only to inner voices, had heard nothing of the cry. He stood rigid, preaching violently, and then he knelt down and prayed fervently with outstretched arms. Finally he arose, went back across the promontory and down the broad path. Frank Braun followed him with his eyes, until he disappeared behind the bushes. Silently he rowed back, tied the boat fast, and carried the girl, who clung heavily to him, into the house.





Chapter Six

“The Lamb is the light of the city of never ending happiness.”

-Petrus Damianus, Archbishop of Ostia.

“Climb, climb that Ladder!”

-Alfred de Musset



His day began in this way: He jumped from his bed, whistled, and slipped into his bathrobe; then he ran down the steps out of the house and to the lake. With one leap he was in the water. Each time he came up he said:

“The devil! It’s hellish cold!”

Nevertheless he bathed and swam far out into the lake. Later he breakfasted and soon sat at his work. He wrote:

“In the beginning was Emotion. And when it ruled the world, it subjected all things to itself, and none ruled beside it. Then something new came, Reason. Step by step it fought against the old power and yet it could never win that mighty autocratic rule which the other had once had. Then, long before it could conquer Emotion, a new, greater power appeared, which pressed hard upon the two older ones.

With strong blows Experience defeated Reason, but could not so easily prevail against the more ancient ruler, Emotion. And that is how it stands now, with poor Reason weakly defending small strongholds. Blind Emotional Instinct still holds great territories with tough tenacity. But unconquerable Experience with ever new weapons continues to rob the others of their lands.

Emotion expressed itself in the rule of theology. Reason stepped forth against it as Philosophy. But then man learned by Experience and found that

neither Reason nor Emotion could reveal the laws of this world to him. To be sure, he needed them both and they may lead him well: but he can gain knowledge only by burrowing to the ultimate reality of things and stripping them of all mere phenomenalism. Thus, stands the triune God: Emotion, Reason and Experience.

With them one can conquer the world.

Emotion asks, 'Where does man come from?'

And gives its answer, which applies to everything:

'God created him.'

Then Reason comes and says, 'No—there is no God.'

But it does not really answer the great question at all. Finally Experience comes and teaches us the truth concerning man's origin. It gives us a long chain and shows his descent, link by link.

Reason puffs itself up and cries, 'There are missing links!'

But Experience finds these missing links, one today and another again tomorrow. Emotion is cunning, it says nothing. It is blind, and puts its fingers to its ears.

Emotion preaches its ancient little speech: 'All men are descended from Adam and Eve!'

But Reason proceeds and builds systems and deems itself very wise indeed. One man says there are three races of men in the world, and another that there are five, and a third that there are seven, and a fourth that there are twelve. A hundred wise men build a hundred systems and each calls the other a fool. And in this point they are all right.

But one should not reproach them. We seek and we dig and it avails us nothing, if chance does not come to our help. There! You happen to find an old bone and suddenly know more than all the learned men before you. Don't be arrogant—because you had good luck. For Experience alone can scarcely lead to any ultimate knowledge. Emotion must point the way and Reason must help, lest one lose one's way in all the gardens of error."

He looked over his table, over the great pile of books and manuscripts.

"There lies my experience!" he thought. "Emotion revealed the way to me. I know that it is the right way. So may reason help me now!"

He brooded, closed his eyes, and supported his head with both hands. Slowly, fragment by fragment, he grasped all that he had gathered, and formed once more the same great image. He reflected searchingly after every detail, stubbornly looking for some error here and there. And he found none; so probably his account was straight. Again and again he sought to locate a point that offered some weakness to attack. But he consistently found that the point was firm.

No, he was not mistaken: The Cro-Magnon race had disappeared from Europe.

“It’s a pity,” he thought. “It was surely the best of all!”

They were giants, these Cro-Magnon folk; when erect, they were over two meters tall. Their skull was larger by one-fourth than that of the other races of their time. Their nose and chin protruded, and, in the age of the mammoth, they already resembled the Europeans of our day. They were great hunters and excellent artists; even today we admire their delineations of animals on the cliff sides of the valley of Vezere, which they carved there toward the end of the ice age. We have traces of them in Spain, in France and in Moravia—but their race is extinct and they are not our ancestors.

There remain the men of Grimaldi, of Galley Hill, and of Neanderthal. In the caverns of the Rousse, the red cliffs of Mentone, were found, among a number of Cro-Magnon men, two skeletons of another type. This Grimaldi race reminded one of the Zulus of today in its jaw formation, and showed Negroid characteristics in other respects too. Now it is certain, however, that at that time the separation between Europe and Africa was a much smaller one than it is today. Therefore it is not surprising that the animals and men of the two continents stood in much closer relation. And even today Negroid traces are found among the inhabitants of the Mediterranean countries.

But the race of Grimaldi bears no relation to the Galley Hill folk. The latter are found exclusively in the north, as the former are in the south. And they were as different from them as from the Neanderthal race in the middle. The top of their skull was very long and narrow, vaulted higher and showed no protuberances over the eye. The lower jaw, however, showed the chin projection like that of the noble race of Cro-Magnon.

Then, in the middle, along a broad belt dwelt the race of Neanderthal. They must have spread out far to the north and to the south in their time,

which was the glacial period of the Alps. In this way one finds the remains of these mountain folk always at the extreme end of the highlands: in the Ardennes, in the Duchy of Berg, on the shores of the Neckar, among the last foothills of the Carso, the Carpathians, and of the western Alps. And this much was certain: the Neanderthal man and the man of Spy, the man of Krapina and the man of Corrèze—they all belonged to the same race, as did the boy of Moustier and the woman of Kerkuelen. They were a great folk, then, stretching from the spurs of the Carpathians to the very cliffs of Brittany, a folk of the hills—even as they are today.

Frank Braun pondered. Was the difference between then and now such an enormous one? One estimated the space of time at three and a half millions of years. And for such a space the development seemed exceedingly small to him. Did not Pietro Nosclere and the short, neckless Venier disturbingly remind one of those prehistoric men? Did not the thick-haired, long-armed serving-man of the American, with his huge dewlap and his frightful jaw, look exactly like some strong-boned contemporary of the mammoth?

He might have bent forward in the same manner as he followed his harrow today, crept into a cavern with a dull cry to throw himself upon a bear, the clumsy stone hatchet in his hand! He could imagine him, how he might have sat, crouching, huddled together, tearing at raw flesh, splintering the hard bones against the rock and sucking their marrow. Yes, that's what that man with the goiter ought to do; it would be more seemly for him than talking about his soul. The whole valley of Scodra seemed to him to be a cage, full of wild beasts. The fathers of that prehistoric time had climbed all around the lake in the hollows and caverns. And their brood still crept there, even today. Animals! Animals! He lifted his arm as if he were swinging a whip. They should jump through hoops for him!

On that same day he went to see Mr. Peter. The sun had set and the peasants were creeping into their houses.

“Like chickens,” he thought.

He went through the village, and climbed up to the American's house. He met the American's small, stout and chubby wife in the garden. She bowed to him and pointed to the barn.

“My husband is in the meeting-hall,” she said. “He will be here in a moment.”

She led him into the house, and offered him a chair. He spoke to her in praise of the shining copper ewers and jugs that hung above the hearth.

“How they gleam and shine!”

She nodded sullenly.

“I’m accustomed to having them that way. But my husband says that I waste too much time on earthly things and look up too little to our Lord Jesus.”

She went on talking, and she kept on saying:

“My husband!” and “My husband!”

These words issued continually from her mouth like white flour from a mill. Frank Braun interrupted her.

“Do tell me; is your husband so pious during the night, too? Surely he sleeps then?”

The Bergamese woman shook her head:

“Yes, but even in his sleep my husband does not forget the Lord. Suddenly he will get up out of his bed, kneel down and pray. My husband is as pious as that. Sometimes, too, my husband will walk over to the meeting-hall or even into the village in the middle of the night. And then he comes back and goes to bed and in the morning remembers nothing about it. My husband —”

Suddenly she got up, frightened.

“Here he comes,” she whispered.

She opened the door for him.

“The Doctor is here!”

Then she put a candle on the table and slipped out softly. Pietro greeted him morosely and reservedly, then lowered his head and squinted at him timidly and acidly.

Frank Braun thought:

“Just wait, my good animal, I’ll teach you how to dance.”

He cried out to him, “How is business?”

Mr. Peter started, and ducked as if under the lash of a whip.

Then, with a sweet and sour smile he said, “Thank you.”

He didn't even dare to pretend that he had not understood the stranger's calling his sacred activity a business.

"Thank you, everything rests in the hands of the Lord. I pray to Him, that he may bless my work."

Frank Braun said, "The Lord will not bless your work. He demands more than singing and praying."

Doubting himself, half convinced by the decided tone of the stranger, Pietro lifted his glance.

"What does He demand?" he asked timidly.

Frank Braun was silent. Everything that the American did at his meetings was a senseless imitation of his Pennsylvania sect. This singing and preaching, this praying and confessing and making of music could have only one purpose: to awaken belief. That might serve very well for the Protestant masses, who had lost their belief, and might, with its noise, lure dull crowds back to the Cross for a while; even as the trumpet of the crier attracts people to the booths of a fair! But could it avail here? All these beasts in Val di Scodra stood as firm in their faith as their own mountains; there had never arisen in them a single doubt of all that which they had once drawn in from the tits of their mothers.

To bring faith to this valley! Why, it grew in every fissure, bloomed and spread rankly from the walls and throttled the valley. No, this people needed something else. If it had a yearning for anything at all, if it harbored an unconscious desire for some event to interrupt the empty sloth of the monotonous years, it could be only one thing—a miracle. He laid his hand on the American's shoulder, his voice was soft, and yet of a strangely penetrating quality.

"Listen, Pietro Nosclere! The Lord demands a miracle of you!"

Mr. Peter stared at him horrified.

"I am to perform a miracle? I? Men don't perform miracles."

"Don't blaspheme!" answered Frank Braun. "Read the history of the saints. You know very well that men perform miracles. You must perform a miracle and you can, Pietro. You are Elijah!"

Pietro stared at him without moving, incapable of answering. The German continued:

“Yes, you are Elijah-Elijah, the prophet. Don’t you know that the souls of the saints can slip into new bodies if the Lord commands it? You harbor the soul of Elijah!”

His words came slowly, with assurance, permitting no doubt.

“It is not in vain that the Lord has blessed you so strangely upon the road of life. He led you across the great sea, caused you to toil bitterly, through long years, for your daily bread. Then He guided your steps to the congregation of your brethren, in order that the light of His spirit might enlighten you. And in His infinite goodness He gave you a great gift and made a rich man of you.”

Mr. Peter nodded silently. Each word penetrated him, dug itself deep into the convolutions of his brain. The other continued:

“But the Lord has a greater thing in mind concerning you. Therefore He drove you away from the strange land: you were to proclaim His Kingdom in the valley of your old home! And the Savior’s grace. And here, while you slept, He breathed into your body the soul of His pious servant, Elijah.”

Pietro staggered like a drunken man and steadied himself by the edge of the table.

“It is true,” he whispered, “I dream of the Blood of the Lamb every night. And my wife says that I get up and walk in my sleep.”

“Yes,” Frank Braun nodded. “But it is not yourself; it is Elijah, the prophet, who dwells in you. He arises and praises the Lord in his sleep. And he considers how he may best proclaim the Kingdom and the Glory and spread them abroad on earth.”

He inclined his head and looked at the man fixedly.

“Pietro Nosclere, you are the chosen one!”

The American could hardly hold himself erect. His arms twitched in brief convulsions, a thin stream of saliva dropped from his half-opened lips. But his glance glowed with a proud intoxication, and lost itself in confused imaginings concerning the exalted master whose mantle had descended upon him. He no longer heard what the other said; his fixed eyes beheld the glories of the Kingdom. Frank Braun shook him angrily.

“Come to yourself, Pietro, I am speaking to you!”

Snatched from his dream and confused, he directed a distrustful side glance at the German. What did this stranger, this unbeliever want of him? How he sat there, cold, smiling and blowing cigarette smoke into his face? He—who was Elijah, the prophet!

Frank Braun tapped him lightly on the knee.

“You are to hear me Pietro, do you understand?”

Oh, yes, he would have to listen, he saw that clearly. He felt that the stranger was tearing away the fog that lay before his eyes, and was showing him the path upon which he was to go. But for that very reason he hated him. He believed every word—that the other spoke and there grew in him the monstrous reverence which he himself, like all the world, must have for himself. Himself! —Elijah the prophet, the chosen of the Lord.

But there sat this doctor from heaven knows where, who had failed miserably to cure the sick woman whom he had healed; this unbelieving dog, who had laughed aloud in the meeting when his farmhand, Scuro, had confessed his soul. There he sat, and with every look, with every gesture, he showed his boundless contempt.

He ground his teeth. Just why had this man been sent? . . . Then he considered.

“The ways of the Lord are past finding out,” he murmured.

He bowed and said in a toneless voice, “Speak, Doctor. What am I to do?”

Frank Braun looked at the other’s distorted face and interpreted his thoughts clearly. Something tempted him to insult him, his foot twitched as if itching to kick him.



“Bring wine!” he commanded.

The American looked up; he felt the lash.

“Sir,” he stammered, “I have no wine. There was never a drop in my house.”

“Wasn’t there?” said Frank Braun lightly. “Then go to Raimondi’s inn. If he sleeps, wake him up: he’ll be well pleased to sell you some wine.”

Pietro arose with difficulty. His fists clenched and he crept like a beaten cur toward the door. Frank Braun laughed after him—laughed lightly, briefly, as he had done when the farmhand confessed his soul. He lit a fresh cigarette and thought about what he should tell the American. He nodded and said half aloud:

“Yes, that will work.”

Mr. Peter brought the wine. Silently he put the bottle on the table and went to fetch a glass.

“Two!” cried Frank Braun.

The other obeyed and the German forced him to touch glasses with him. He had to empty his glass and to fill it again immediately.

“So, Pietro, now you’ll understand me better!”

The American bit his lips and pressed his hands together. One could see what pains he took to follow the words of the stranger, to understand every thought and impress it firmly upon his mind. The unaccustomed wine heated him, and caused everything that was said to him to appear even clearer and more natural.

But before Frank Braun began, he asked him:

“Pietro, do you love me?”

As the other did not answer, he continued; “Surely you know that one should love one’s neighbor as one’s self.”

The American looked toward the floor, and squirmed like a schoolboy. But the German would not let him off.

“You are to tell me the truth, Pietro! This very moment. Do you love me?”

The man stammered, “No, sir—I believe not.”

Frank Braun laughed.

“Well, it isn’t really necessary—if only you obey! And you must obey me, for no one will show you the way if I don’t.”

Mr. Peter sighed; he felt clearly that it was so.

“Then listen, Pietro,” Frank Braun continued. “What have you done in your native village? You have preached faith to the people—yet there was no one who was without faith. You have spoken of repentance—and they were all ready to repent long before you came. You persuaded them to confess their sins publicly, before the congregation, but do you think that that is enough in the eyes of the Lord? Furthermore, you have made them to renounce wine.

No one can deny that is a meritorious deed! But believe me, Pietro, the Lord demands more. And even those who are your followers will soon enough be satiated with your teaching. They, too, demand something greater of you! You have summoned them to fight the devil and you have promised them to drive him out. But what are your weapons? Song and prayer—weapons of wood! But I tell you, Pietro, the devil cares little for singing and praying; he laughs all the while and remains quietly crouching behind the stove. If you want to go after him in earnest, you need better weapons!

“But where is the armory that can give you weapons strong enough to avail against the might of Satan? Note well, Pietro Nosclere, and I will make it plain to you, I, who know the world and all its depths. Behold, I will lead you to the lives of the saints. What says Paul, the apostle?

‘Castigate my body, and bring it into submission: lest that by any means, after I have preached to others, I should be a castaway.’

You preach also, Pietro, but when have you ever castigated your body? I will tell you a story, which Saint Vincent records.

In the monastery of Saint Sylvester, near Urbino, a certain monk died there seven hundred years ago. As always, the brothers sang the lamentations for the dead, songs and psalms; but when they came to the Agnus Dei, the dead man arose. They all thronged around him in order to hear what he might say; but he cursed and blasphemed God, the Cross and the Holy Virgin. The torments of hell, he said, were exceedingly cruel, and no amount of praying and singing would help him.

They adjured him to repent; but out of his mouth issued forth more and more ghastly curses. Then the monks determined to pray for his soul; finally, however, when all this availed nothing, they stripped themselves of their garments, grasped their scourges and beat themselves.

Then, at last, reason returned to the desperate dead man, he repented of his error and prayed for forgiveness, and thus he lived and praised God, the Lord, until the next day.

Do you understand the meaning of this story, Pietro? What song and prayer were powerless to do was brought about by scourging: it was that which drove the evil fiend out of the body of the poor monastic brothers. That is the path which the saints show us.

Saint Francis of Assisi knew it well, and his scourge tore deep wounds into his own flesh and into that of his brothers and sisters. Saint Dominic of Guzman flagellated himself until he fell down unconscious; but the Mother of God herself tended his wounds. Whenever he castigated himself the air was full of evil spirits, who howled and cursed because the deeds of this man snatched so many thousands of souls from out of the eternal fire.

Johannes Tauler was his pupil and the ornament of his order; he swung the whip no less vigorously than his master. And so too, did Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and raised the scourge against the sinful body.

Listen, O Pietro, to this teaching which Saint John of Nitria gives us.

‘The blood,’ he said, ‘which the scourge draws from you, is mixed with the blood of the Savior shed on the Cross to redeem you. Self-castigation renders all confession superfluous, and is more meritorious than even the martyr’s death, for the former is voluntary, but the latter is enforced. It is a new baptism and a baptism in the Blood of the Lamb: Every true Christian should be baptized in His own blood. Self-castigation effects the forgiveness of all former and all future sins, it is better than all good works.’

Such was the teaching of this holy man.

Father Achatius, a pious Capuchin of the monastery at Diiren, calls out to us:

‘Man is incapable of governing the desires of the flesh. But even if his body sins, yet his soul may serve the Lord. The soul belongs to God and the body to the world. God speaks to man from above, and the world speaks to

him from below; each demands a share. But through the castigation of the body that sin, which the world bids man to do, is washed away and forgiven!’

But do not believe, Pietro Nosclere, that only holy men humiliated and castigated their bodies! Weak women did just as much, and often heaven opened to the sight of their wounds.

Saint Teresa, the foundress of the Carmelite order, was the first who carried her scourge together with her missal. When she was seven years old she read the lives of the saints which you, Pietro, do not even know today. Together with her little brother she determined to go among the heathen, in order to suffer a martyr’s death. Her parents restrained her and the pious child then lived the life of a hermit. When she was scarcely grown up she entered a convent; there the garment of haircloth, the rod and the scourge were her friends! She felt but one rapture; to beat herself and to be beaten, she would have given her very life to be able to scourge the whole world or to be scourged by the whole world! And her magnificent example found wide imitation among all the monks and the nuns of the cloister; they all emulated each other in using the scourge and thus attaining to the Kingdom of the Lord. They all castigated themselves daily, and some twice and three times daily.

The pious Sister Maria, to whom the scourge did not suffice, beat herself with a poker; Brother Alexander, even beat her with red hot iron.

Still more pious was Sister Caterina of Cardona. She wore a garment of haircloth, and iron chains which cut deep into her flesh. She lived like a hermit in the lowest cellar and slept on the damp ground with a stone for a pillow. She had many instruments for castigation, and lashed herself uninterruptedly for three hours. She wounded herself with needles and thorns and singed her flesh; even at night she scarcely slept, but continued in her holy work. At the very mention of her name the pious Bishop Eulogius of Biserta wept with profound reverence.

Another sister among the Carmelites was Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi of Florence. She began to castigate herself at the age of ten. In the convent she scourged herself four times a day and slept with a crown of thorns around her head and a girdle of thorns around her body. When the bishop asked the pious nun to express some wish, she begged to be tied naked to the altar on Sunday and to be scourged. And God regarded her humility

graciously and was pleased with the sacrifice of her blood. Visions were often granted to her; she saw heaven open wide and beheld its splendor.

Mother Pasidea of Siena, who belonged to the Cistercian order, was no less strict. She beat herself with fragments of iron, slept in the snow in winter and among nettles and thorns in summer. When the scourge ripped her skin in shreds, she caused salt and vinegar to be poured on her wounds. She lashed her body with thorny branches and lay upon stones and hard beans. To her, too, by virtue of the scourge, it was vouchsafed to see the Lord Jesus with her own eyes, as it was to the pious sister, Elizabeth of Genton.

Clara Seifo was the devout friend of Saint Francis of Assisi and when he granted her the favor of striking her naked body with rods, she scourged the body of the saint. They prayed together, they whipped each other, and as a reward the Madonna with the Child appeared to them in a vision.

Isabella, the daughter of King Louis the XIIIth of France, founded the order of Saint Urban; she herself and her sisters received the bread of the scourge daily.

Maria Laurentia Longa founded the Capuchin order at Naples, and it is said that there was no spot upon her body or that of her sisters that was not covered with blood. Her holy example was followed by Louise of Lorraine in Marseilles, Jeanne of Valois at Paris, Angelina of Kortain at Foligny, and Beatrice de Portalegre at Madrid.

Never did the scourges know rest in these pious hands. Saint Benedict has told us that only the scourge can make our hearing more acute for the words which the Lord God would speak to us. Among his followers was counted Queen Anne of Austria, who often caused herself to be scourged by pious men.

Shall I name more names to you, Pietro?

The history of the saints is full of pious men and women, who knew well the grace of God that lie in their blows and wounds. For He remembers how the Jews tore away His son, Jesus, from the proconsul Pilate's, house; remembers how the men at arms bound Him and stripped Him, pressed a crown of thorns upon His Head, spat upon Him and struck Him. And it is pleasing in the eyes of the Lord, if the pious voluntarily endure the shame and the torture which His beloved Son suffered for the sake of the world.

That is the path which leads to the Lamb, and except for it there is no other.

All the saints went this path and to all the Lord showed Himself and gave to all of them the grace of miracles.

Did not, upon a gesture of Saint Benedict, the temple of the heathen god, Apollo, of Monte Cassino fall into ruins? Did not Saint Ignatius alone perform over two hundred miracles? And who shall number the miracles of Saint Francis?

Therefore take up the scourge and lash your body, Pietro Nosclere, for you are Elijah, the prophet!”

Frank Braun stopped. The American stared at him; his lips and his tongue moved without speaking; it seemed as if he had lost the power of speech. Stammering and with pain, the words wrung themselves from him:

“Sir—sir—who are you?”

“You animal!” the German burst out at him.

Then he poured a glassful of wine and pressed it to the other’s lips.

“There—drink!—that’s it—it’s no business of yours, you fool, who I am! You think over what I’ve told you; that’s enough for your brain.”

He got up and turned to go.

“One other thing I wanted to tell you, Pietro, and mark it well! It is true, as your brothers in Pennsylvania taught you, that alcohol is a poison and that the devil dwells in it. And you did right when you preached, as they do, that one should flee from the wine and drink not a drop. But you forgot one thing: that in the hand of the anointed, when he stands before the congregation, at the feet of the Lord, the wine changes into blood which the Savior shed for the sake of mankind. You have forgotten what you yourself saw so often when you went to holy mass. And you have misled everyone here, all your brothers and sisters, and they have forgotten the great mystery of transubstantiation.

Well, Pietro, within you dwells the highest servant of the Lord, and you are a chosen and anointed one, and in your hands the devil’s juice must turn into the Redeemer’s Blood. Not here, to be sure, nor now, when you drink what I give you! Now you drink Satan’s unclean poison! But when you stand before the congregation, then, in your hand, as in any priest’s, the

wine undergoes the mystic transformation. And then you are to drink and you are to cause your brothers and sisters to drink, in order that their bodies, too, may have a share in the mysterious grace of the Blood of the Lamb.”

He took the glass, filled it anew and sipped. Then he continued:

“Remember this well, Pietro! But now, my prophet, take from my hand the glowing poison of Satan! There, set your lips here where my lips have been, and drain this glass!”

The American jumped up and thrust him back. He tried to run from the room, but Frank Braun barred his passage. Frightened, Pietro stood huddled in a corner of the room behind a bench.

“No, no, I don’t want to! Go away! Let me be!”

Frank Braun approached him, the glass in his hand.

“I know you don’t want to, Pietro,” he said, “but you must! Do you hear? You must!”

He gave him the glass and the trembling Nosclere put it to his lips. He took a mouthful and spat it out again, for his mouth burned as if from the fires of hell.

“You must drink,” the German insisted.

And Mr. Peter drank. His legs shook. His eyes turned upward. It seemed like molten lead that ran down his throat.

“That is well,” Frank Braun said. “Good—night.”

Then he went. Pietro Nosclere crouched in his corner. His legs trembled and refused their service; he collapsed like a bag.

“He has poisoned me!” he moaned.

He crept to the table on all fours, raised himself with difficulty, took the bottle and shattered it against the edge. His entrails burned. He pressed his hands to his abdomen in the belief that he was being consumed from within outward. It was the devil who was in him and tormented him. His abdomen swelled up to a mighty sphere and within it Satan sat grinning, laughed a neighing laugh and turned somersaults. He was a black giant and his claws were long and hard as steel. He grasped his intestines, thrust into them with his pointed horns and exhaled smoke and fire. Pietro felt the poisonous fumes come up in his throat, felt the red-hot breath issue from his

mouth. He howled and rolled about on the floor, as if he could in this way quench the fire that was consuming his body.

But Satan stretched out his arm and, from below, thrust the pointed nail of his thumb into his head, and then Pietro swung about on his own pivot, like a mad ram. He felt as if the devil were drawing him together from within, pressing his head down and pulling up his knees to his shoulders. He lay there like a knot, like a round ball, like this the arch-enemy now desired to roll him forward—down the stairs and to the lake, deeper, ever deeper, into the hellish fire. Then he would burst with a loud report, and Beelzebub would leap forth from him with hellish laughter into the midst of his black companions. With his last strength Pietro threw himself upon his knees.

“Lord, God in Heaven, help your servant, Elijah!”

Then it came to pass that the fiend went forth from him. It threw him forward and down; it rose in his throat like a thick ball. It choked and gagged him; it forced his mouth wide open. And through his teeth, with stench and vomit, Satan sprang, driven forth by the name of the Lord . . . Pietro spewed—

When Frank Braun closed the door of the American’s house he saw a figure in the shadow of the trees; he recognized Teresa. He whistled to her as to a dog. She flew to him and behind her in great bounds came the goat, Marfa.

“Have you two been waiting for me?” he asked. “Has it been long?”

“Yes,” said the girl.

“Forgive me.”

He caressed her cheeks. He put one arm around her neck, his other hand rested on the head of the goat. And he knew that they were both happy. They went home.





Chapter Seven

*“She was a Rose of Sharon and a
Lilly of the valley.”*

THE SONG OF SONGS



he rough, blustering voice of the border guard called out in front of the house; Frank Braun stepped to the window. He saw Aloys Drenker, who led a vigorous horse by the bridle, push his broad body ahead. The old beggar woman, Sibylla Madruzzo, lay across the saddle, like two old sacks on top of one another.

“Hello!” he called down. “What’s happened to her?”

Drenker waved his arm in greeting.

“Nothing!” he answered. “What should have happened to her? She is an old friend of mine and I always lift her onto my horse, up there on the road, when I come to the village in the evening. She can get down more comfortably that way with her stiff bones.”

The farmhand and Teresa helped the old woman down from the horse; she nodded her head in thanks. Drenker invited her to come in to eat and to drink a drop of wine. But she declined with a gesture and, leaning on her short staff, crept painfully onward into the village.

“Sibylla won’t drink any longer,” Teresa declared. “She, too, has now found the salvation which the American preaches.”

“Her too?” the guard looked after her. “Poor woman!”

Then he called up to Frank Braun’s window:

“I’ve brought something along for you, Doctor! No man shall be able to say that Aloys Drenker does not keep his word!”

Teresa came to his room and brought him the well packed up brightly polished helmet.

“There is something else for you here,” she said hesitatingly. “A letter from the priest—he sent it by Herr Drenker!”

“Is that so?” he laughed. “For me—not for you?”

She lowered her eyes.

“No, your name is on it.”

He took the letter.

“Didn’t you write to him again?”

She shook her head.

“No.”

Her voice sounded a little ashamed. Then she went out. He opened the letter and read it.

“My dear Sir:—

“I am disquieted because I hear nothing from Val di Scodra; Teresa Raimondi has not written to me since she confessed to me the last time. The girl has undoubtedly told you that she confessed to me; therefore you know that I am a sharer of your secret. I cannot, of course, my dear sir, speak to you as a priest or as I do to my penitents; but let me speak to your heart as an old man, one who has nothing more to do in this world than to try, as far as his poor powers go, to lighten a little misery and to cause a little good.

In spite of everything, I would gladly travel to my native village myself to set things right, because I have a vague feeling that something evil is brewing there. But, the Bishop, to whom I expressed my wish once more, expressly forbade me to go; I am not to go there again until the congregation itself is ready to recall its shepherd. You know his principles.

Now Teresa was my only faithful lamb in that valley of devil hunters—pray God that Satan, whom they want to drive out, does not reverse the role and turn the hunters into his helpless prey! But Teresa has been taken from me by you. Nothing is further from my thoughts than to address reproaches to you; after all, you would only laugh at them. I have placed the whole matter into God’s kindly hands, and you may believe me that my prayers rise to Heaven as warmly for you as for my poor penitent.

My fervent wish—and I have not had a more fervent one for many years—is this, that the Highest may turn everything unto good! It was I, you

see, who sent you to Val di Scodra—and so my guilt is scarcely a lesser one, if—anything were to happen . . .

I really do not know what could happen, and I reproach myself and call myself a fool, because I am so troubled with anxiety about nothing. It is only this gray, dim presentiment, which does not release me and follows me day and night. And, as you probably know, my dear sir, I am even more burdened by my share in the misfortune which, I trust, the merciful kindness of Heaven will see fit to moderate.

When I saw my poor penitent in such extreme torment at my feet, when I saw how her young soul was consuming itself in this fervent love for you, my dear sir, how everything in her cried out not to be deflected from that path, which seemed to her the highest blessedness on earth—at that moment, as you well know, I did not thrust her back.

When I calmly reflect today on what I did in that fateful moment—and I think of it a hundred times a day—it would seem to me that I committed a heavy wrong against the poor child. Now she is free to lie in your arms and it is I myself who gave her a blessing. And yet, when I recall that moment as it was, when I reconstruct it imaginatively, I am forced to believe that I would act over again as I did then. In this way my feelings toss me to and fro and there seems no end to it all.

I recall, too, my dear sir, our conversation when I talked to you of Val di Scodra. Perhaps I took the remark which you threw out then far too seriously—or, rather, it appears much more serious now that my thoughts are involuntarily busy with it, than it was ever meant to be. I brood and reflect in vain as to what I really fear, what evil is there, after all, that you could institute in my native village! But it is in vain that I tell myself of the groundlessness of my fears, and that you will surely not play some trick on these poor, deluded people of Val di Scodra.

I cannot become liberated from this baleful foreboding. And I have quite the same experience when I think of my penitent. To be quite sure, your relations to Teresa are not permissible and are a horror before the Lord—you will forgive an old priest for falling into this manner of speaking at times. I know the world quite a little and I know very well that one cannot use the same comb on every sheep, must not apply the same standard to all souls. Teresa loves you and this love is the happiness of her life, perhaps the only one she will ever know. Do I have I the right to rob her of this brief

happiness? What was there for her to expect in that remote valley, among the rough peasants of her home? A slow withering, and then death, such as overtook her poor mother. And the accident that took you into the valley gave her a happiness which she will never forget, brief as it may be, and old as she may grow.

No one, you may believe me, grudges her this happiness as little as her Father confessor. This is so true that I, a priest, have disregarded the demands of both religion and worldly morals in this matter! And I would consider myself rewarded, if only for a moment I could have the assurance that it really is her happiness!

But you see, my dear sir, the more I think and brood, the more I give myself up to this thought, the more this dim foreboding grows. I fight against it as well as I can; but the thought fastens itself ever more firmly in my brain that your presence in the valley will bring some evil to Teresa and to the village. Nothing has happened yet, but something frightful may, indeed will happen! And it is I who, in the last analysis, bear the guilt.

Call me an old simpleton, if you will; say that I am growing childish in my old age—perhaps you are right. Perhaps it is my years that suddenly affect me so and cause me to see ghosts in the light of day. But whatever it may be, I want you to believe that I suffer under it. I have done everything to shake off these morbid thoughts. But I cannot, cannot! They revive within me with ever renewed violence.

And so I turn to you as to the only one who can help. I beg of you; pack your trunk and leave Val di Scodra! Senseless as my request may seem to you—I beseech you to grant it. Even while I write this the conviction seizes me with inescapable assurance: something will happen, terrible for Val di Scodra, terrible for Teresa—terrible, likewise, for you.

I beg of you, on my knees I beg of you, my dear sir, go! Then everything will be well—but start at once, at this very hour—”

Frank Braun read no further.

“So you too, are clairvoyant, Don Vincenzo?” he thought. “But really, your prophecy is a bit cheap! A great misfortune—that sounds like the oracle of a fortune-teller:

‘You are going on a journey, you will receive money.’”

“Priest, priest,” he continued slowly, “you don’t know what you’re doing. Your letter is kind and very touching and ever so decent. But the time is long past when I am to be impressed by what is touching and decent and kind!”

He put the letter in his pocket; then he went downstairs. The guard received him loudly; he sat at the table with the landlord, while Teresa served the food. Proudly he showed his new helmet and said that he would never in his life forget the night on which he had lost the old one. He looked admiringly at Frank Braun. Yes, there was a fellow for you!

Frank Braun was not in a mood to sing and drink. Drenker’s praises annoyed him, so he changed the subject.

“I didn’t know the old beggar-woman was a friend of yours?”

The guard said, “Assuredly she is a friend. She’s not as old as you think: a couple of years younger than me, and at least ten years younger than Raimondi. He repeated this three times, three times, so that the landlord could understand him.

The latter nodded affirmatively, “She only looks old.”

Drenker laughed, “Sibylla looks as if she were eighty or a hundred or a hundred and twenty! It’s all the same. And it’s true, nevertheless, that we were all three in love with her.”

Frank Braun was glad that the affair of the wines and the helmet was settled. He held the other fast.

“Three? Who was in love with the old woman?” he asked.

“Oh, we were in love with the young Sibylla—not with the old one!”

Drenker corrected him.

“We were all three in love with her: Raimondi, Ussolo and myself—three gallant men of the Emperor’s Rifles! Never did a girl in Val di Scodra have better lovers—eh, Raimondi? But it came to an evil end, and poor Sibylla is dragging her cross around to this day. For in those days, sir, she was as straight and slender as a young fir tree and there was no prettier girl in all the Tyrol. But when poor Ussolo came to such a wretched end, it was then that something gave way inside her.”

“Do tell me about it,” Frank Braun urged him.

“Tell about it—yes, but it’s quite a long story!” cried Drenker. “And without anything to drink?”

He poured the last drop from the bottle into his glass. Frank Braun bade the landlord fetch a few bottles of the *Vino Santo* from the valley of Toblin. He stood them up close in front of the guard. Drenker wanted to pour some for him, but he warded him off.

“No, thank you, I don’t care to drink today.”

Drenker shook his head.

“You learned gentlemen are queer! One time you’ll drink like ten old skippers, and then again not a drop! There’s neither sense nor reason to it.”

“No,” Frank Braun agreed. “There is absolutely neither sense nor reason to it. But now drink, Drenker, and tell us about the three lovers of the young Sibylla Madruzzo.”

The guard cleared his throat and lit his pipe. He raised the glass to his lips, drank, and clicked his tongue in praise of the wine. Then he began. He told his story loudly, hastily, and in disjointed sentences. Constantly he turned, shouting to the landlord:

“Wasn’t it so, Raimondi?”

The latter nodded silently or muttered a “Yes” between his teeth.

“I suppose it was thirty years ago,” said Aloys Drenker. “We were all stationed at Bozen, and were the best friends in the world. Ussolo, he was from Val di Scodra, too; over there where the path leads up to the promontory with the crosses, stood the house of his people. It has long fallen into ruin. Poor Ussolo lies in the churchyard and all his relatives are over in the Argentine. No one is left of his kith and kin! Well, we three belonged to the Emperor’s Rifles in Bozen; Ussolo and I were sergeants—but Raimondi had just been promoted to be sergeant-major, eh, old man?”

Very well, when those two were on furlough they went home, and I went with them a couple of times. For, you know, I had no home; my poor mother delivered me in a ditch along the road and the shock of my birth killed her. So I was pushed around and beaten among strangers, and I felt contented only when I joined the company. The Emperor’s Rifles—they were my family—and a smart family, too, weren’t they, Raimondi? The devil take me if there’s a better regiment in the whole world!

As I told you, I came several times with my friends down to Val di Scodra—once with Raimondi and twice with Ussolo. Well, you can imagine how the people stared when we arrived! The whole village was in love with us. And we three—were in love with Sibylla, and each did our best to please her.

But none of us said anything, either to the others, or to the girl. Each one considered, and each one determined upon a plan, but no one would out with it. We all wrote her letters and she wrote to us, too, but, I must tell you, to all three together. And so, one evening in winter as we were sitting together in the canteen, Ussolo said that he would resign and not re-enlist. I thought he had had a stroke, and I asked him whether the devil had gone after him?

Then it came out! He said that he was in love with Sibylla and wanted to marry her and live with her and cultivate his land in Val di Scodra. He had already written his mother—for his father was dead—and she had agreed that he should take over the farm. Now at his next furlough he intended to talk to the girl. Then Raimondi broke loose!—You needn't be ashamed old man, it was so—For remember that in those days he hadn't yet met the beautiful Maria, the daughter of the schoolmaster in Brixen, who later became his wife and Teresa's mother. In those days his one thought was Sibylla and always Sibylla! Well, wasn't it so, old fellow? . . . Therefore he went for Ussolo and said he shouldn't dare to think of the girl. It was he who must have her and no one else! And he was the older and a sergeant-major. But I couldn't restrain myself any longer either. It didn't matter a bit, I said, whether one was older or younger, a sergeant-major or not. I loved Sibylla too, and wanted her, and didn't give a damn about these Italian fools. I cried out and Raimondi roared and Ussolo howled, and before we had time to think we were pulling each other's hair and beating each other so that it was great fun.

A lieutenant intervened and disturbed our amusement; then in medium hard confinement we all three had time to think over our love and our folly. When we came out our excitement had cooled noticeably, and we realized that it was mighty stupid to quarrel about a girl that only one of us could have. So we determined to leave the choice to Sibylla herself and, to arrange this, we would travel together to Val di Scodra during our September furlough.

In the meantime, it was agreed that no one was to write to her separately; so we always wrote to her together and sent her a common present at Christmas and Easter. It wasn't much, to be sure, a silk scarf and a silver buckle—but Sibylla has kept them to this day and the letters, too. Very well. Spring came and then summer, and none of us felt very happy. Each distrusted the other two and every few days one of us had to swear to the others that he had quite certainly not written a letter behind their back. Finally the fall maneuvers came, and then the day on which we received our leave of absence.

It was hard enough for the three of us to get off at the same time, since Raimondi and I were in the same company. But finally it was accomplished. I'll never forget the journey in all my days. No one spoke a word and each looked as if he wanted to devour the others alive. I believe it was only the uniform which still kept us together; otherwise we would have gone for each other as we did that evening in the canteen.

In those days no stagecoach came to the valley, but if one had come we would not have waited for it. We marched along and arrived late at night. Raimondi went to his parents; I went home with Ussolo. I didn't sleep a wink all night; I was constantly afraid one of my comrades might get up and go to the Madruzzo house. They fared no better. It was scarcely light when we started to go for Raimondi, out of fear that he might get ahead of us. We had scarcely reached the house when he came out too—evidently with the same idea as ourselves. Now we realized that it was far too early to go to Sibylla, especially as it was Sunday. We went back again into Raimondi's house, cooked our coffee, and breakfasted.

Then Ussolo stepped up to the mirror. We had been in such a hurry to get up that we had scarcely combed our hair! He dressed his hair and made himself handsome—and then it came out that we had remained very good friends and comrades after all. Raimondi fetched all he had: shoe polish, brushes, combs, even wax for our mustaches, and we helped one another get ourselves up as finely as possible. An Emperor's Rifle must be sharp, mustn't he, Raimondi? So the time passed more quickly than we thought. Then Raimondi's parents came and we had to drink coffee once more with them.

Finally we started, stopped in the garden to cut a few roses for our caps, and then went on to the Madruzzo house. And before we even got

there Ussolo cried:

‘Here she comes!’

And there, as a matter of fact, she stood before us in the garden of olives and laughed. She was in her Sunday best and she was so neat and pretty that my very heart was glad. And yet it kept thumping so, and I felt so afraid, that I scarcely dared to approach a step. But my two comrades fared no better and stopped short too.

Raimondi said, ‘Friends, I am the oldest!’

‘Yes,’ said I, ‘You are that indeed—and yet—’

But he whispered, ‘Keep still and listen to what I say! We have agreed that she is to have the one that she wants. But the other two are not to be his enemies on that account, but good friends as before!’

‘Are you so sure of yourself?’ I thought.

But I was sure of myself too, for I believed with assurance that her laugh had been meant for me and not for the others.

Therefore I said, ‘Your hand on it!’ and agreed.

Ussolo said nothing at all, but he, too, gave his hand in pledge.

‘Very well, then,’ said Raimondi. ‘Forward march!—and I’m going to speak first because I’m the oldest and a sergeant-major!’

That didn’t please me the least bit, but there was no more time for discussion, for he went ahead with long strides, and we had to keep up with him. We saluted with our hands to our caps and Raimondi was about to begin a speech, but nothing came out. We stood silently before her and stared at her. Then the dark Sibylla laughed and stretched out her hands and asked how we were, and said how pleasant it was that we had all three come here on leave. She thanked us for the letters and the present and said that she had plaited a watch-fob for each one of us out of her own hair. So we talked, but we really said nothing and only Sibylla laughed and chattered and we stood there like three country oafs and stared at her.

I realized that all this was shameful for the Emperor’s Rifles and nudged Raimondi that he should speak to her. But he acted as if he hadn’t noticed anything.

Then I whispered to Ussolo: ‘You talk then!’

Ussolo did talk—but what! He told her, stammering, where we had been at our maneuvers. Then I was going to speak, but that didn't work either. If only the others hadn't been there, I could have spoken easily enough; I felt that.

On this fact I founded my plan. I told Sibylla that we three wanted to speak to each other privately for a moment. She laughed and was about to go home again at once, but I begged her to wait a little while; so she stepped aside into the olive grove. Then I said to the other two that they were asses and I another: that we were asses all three! And that we couldn't proceed in this way.

I took three blades of grass and held them in my hand: whoever drew the longest—he was to be permitted to speak to her first and alone. To this the others agreed: The sergeant-major tried first, then Ussolo; he drew the longest blade; I had the shortest of all, and so my turn came last. Well, I consoled myself, for I was convinced that the two Italians would get a refusal and that she would wait for me. In the meantime, Ussolo went to Sibylla and we two sat down in the grass, turned our backs to them and waited.

A soldier, you see, is accustomed to waiting; one learns that on sentry duty. But although there were two of us, never did waiting seem as long as this time.

‘Aren't they done yet?’ I thought.

Neither of us spoke a word; I saw how Raimondi stared straight ahead of him.

Suddenly he said, ‘Well, I can't bear it any longer. Ussolo ought to have been through long ago!’

We turned around, but the two had disappeared. We got up and went a little further into the olive grove, looked to the right and to the left, but saw no one. I called, softly at first, and then louder:

‘Ussolo!’

But no one answered. Then Raimondi roared as if he were commanding three regiments:

‘Ussolo! Ussolo!’

Then the fellow answered:

‘Yes! Yes! We are coming now!’

And immediately after that they came running up to us. Ussolo’s entire brown face laughed and he stretched out both of his hands.

‘Forgive me, comrades, but we had both really quite forgotten you!’

Then, when he saw our vexed and confused expression, he stood at attention, put his hand to his cap and said:

‘Sergeant-major, I respectfully beg to announce the betrothal of Sergeant Ussolo and Sibylla Madruzzo! And the girl made a very serious face and a deep courtesy. Later I asked Sibylla which of us had had the most stupid expression, Raimondi or I. But unfortunately she hadn’t observed, and so we’ll never be able to ascertain. But we both looked very foolish, you may be sure!’

Raimondi recovered himself first. He put his hand in his pocket and drew out a pretty purse, set with silver, which he gave to Sibylla, and congratulated them both. Then I, too, took out the earrings that I had bought for her, and gave them to her as a bridal gift. Ussolo struck his forehead and cried:

‘Good heavens, and I entirely forgot to give her my present!’

At that he pulled out a pretty little watch. So we had all three secretly brought something for her, but it now profited Ussolo alone. Poor fellow, if he had only known how brief his happiness would be!

Then we left those two alone and I went home with Raimondi. We were both a good bit cast down, and yet we both felt eased that, at least, the intolerable uncertainty was at an end. We determined to be very brotherly to both of them, as became genuine comrades who had been true friends for so many years. But it wasn’t as easy as we thought, each time we saw Ussolo and Sibylla in their great happiness we grew jealous, and it was easy to see how at the bottom we grudged it to them. So we thought that perhaps it would be best to travel back to Bozen even before our furlough expired.

If only we had done that! But Ussolo pressed and urged us to stay at least until the following Sunday. There was to be a church festival in the neighboring village—in Cimego, you know, seven hours distant across the hills toward the border. There is a headquarters of border guards there now, and it’s my home.

Ussolo had invited us to go there; he had relatives there, and he wanted to show them his lovely betrothed—and us, too, his friends from the regiment. We cared very little about it; our minds were not in the mood for merrymaking and festival. But Ussolo would not desist and Sibylla joined her prayers to his, so we permitted ourselves to be persuaded. We planned, then, to have our parting feast at Cimego and then to return to the regiment. We determined to start at night, and to rest at a charcoal burner's hut on the way, in order to arrive in the village early in the morning.

Now I must tell you that Ussolo was fond of drinking. Not that he was a drunkard, but he could tolerate very little, and even after a few glasses he grew very merry and sometimes unruly. And now in his delight as a man about to be married, and at home on leave among his old acquaintances and friends who invited him to take a glass with them, he was merry every evening and noisy and rowdy in the street. Sibylla didn't like that in the least; she had known the evil of drink from her childhood on. For her father, old Carlo Madruzzo, had the most seasoned gullet in the village, and scarcely a day passed in which she didn't feel the drunken weight of his fists. So it was no wonder that she should hate to see her betrothed's fondness for the bottle. She reproached him and he promised her not to touch another glass—but in the evening he was drunk again.

So it came about that Sibylla hated the wine which Ussolo drank even more than that which flowed down her father's throat. The Saturday night on which we started—it was dark and there was not a star in the sky—Sibylla arranged it so that I walked with her, while Ussolo and the sergeant-major preceded us by a few paces. Raimondi and Sibylla carried lanterns; her betrothed dragged a heavy basket, in which he had laid upon fresh foliage the fishes which he had caught in the lake that evening and wanted to take to his uncle in Cimego. I carried the knapsack, which Ussolo had packed too; there was bread in it, ham and sausage, and in addition, five bottles of good wine.

When we came to a spring at the end of half an hour, she stopped and asked me to give her the knapsack. She waited a little, until she thought the other two were far enough away, and then took out the bottles and opened them. She asked me whether I wanted to drink once more, and I took a few hearty draughts. Then she poured out the wine, one bottle after another. I wanted to prevent her but she laughed and said that for this one night I

might easily do without wine, since there would be enough of it tomorrow at Cimego. She filled the bottles to the top with water and carefully corked them again. We were both amused at the thought of Ussolo's expression when he would discover that his wine had turned into water.

We went ahead vigorously and soon caught up with the others. We shouted our soldier songs and between them the lovely Sibylla sang. So the hours passed. Several times Ussolo proposed that we should drink a glass of wine; but I would not hand out the wine, and told him he must wait till we reached our resting place in the charcoal burner's cottage.

We had marched off at nine o'clock and could have comfortably reached the cottage by three o'clock in the morning. We wanted to take some refreshments there and lie down for a while; we had our great-coats, and for Sibylla there was a warm cover which Raimondi carried. Then we intended to climb down for a couple of hours the last bit of the way into the Cimego valley. It was cold enough on the road and Ussolo put his great-coat around the girl. But we were all merry and in high spirits and as we marched along thus, either one behind the other or arm in arm wherever the path grew broader, it seemed to us as if this lovely rose did not belong to Ussolo alone, but was the common property of us three comrades of the Emperor's Rifles.

One o'clock had passed when we went through the ravine of the Boazol. Raimondi walked ahead with the lantern, I behind him. Then came Sibylla, and Ussolo brought up the rear. Suddenly I heard him curse; he had slipped and lay on the stones. But he jumped up again at once. I turned and looked toward him; Sibylla's lantern shed sufficient light on him.

'The damned beast!' he cried.

And I saw by the light of the lantern that he was holding a little snake in his hand. He grasped it by the tail and shattered its head against the rock.

'Did it bite you?' the girl asked anxiously.

He laughed and said that in all events he had noticed nothing. We had all stepped up to him and saw that in falling he had scraped both his face and his hands a little. Sibylla dusted him with her kerchief. Then he took up his basket again and we went on; this time he walked behind Raimondi and I came later.

“But scarcely five minutes had passed when Ussolo stopped with chattering teeth; he was shaking with cold and begged Raimondi to lend him his great-coat. He put it on and in addition wrapped the cover, which was meant for Sibylla, around his shoulders, but he was still freezing cold. I called out to him to walk ahead vigorously and he did so. After a while I saw how he was supporting himself with his hand against the rock; it was as if he were drunk. But he said nothing, and so I was silent too in order not to frighten the girl. We walked that way for a space; then dizziness came over him again; he stumbled and would have fallen flat had not Raimondi supported him. He put down the basket and stood up with difficulty, clinging to the wall of the cliff.

‘What’s wrong with you?’ cried Sibylla.

He shook his head and tried to laugh.

‘Nothing,’ he said.

‘I don’t know—’

The sergeant-major held the lantern to his face. Then he grasped his left hand and looked at it closely on both sides.

‘There, you donkey,’ he cried, ‘of course it’s bitten you!’

We pressed around him and I noticed a tiny wound in his wrist; a little drop of blood came out, scarcely larger than a pinhead. The hand and joint were swollen, and continued to swell swiftly and almost visibly. Raimondi, who had taken the hospital assistant’s course, at once put his hand in his pocket and took out a cloth. Then his glance fell on the knapsack. He put back the cloth and ordered me to cut off the cords. We made a tourniquet above the wound, and pulled the cord as tight as possible, so that it cut deep into his skin. In the meantime Ussolo reeled to and fro and we had to lay him flat on the ground.

Raimondi said:

‘That is the first thing necessary. Now we must suck out the wound.’

Sibylla at once threw herself over her betrothed, but Raimondi pulled her back. He threw the light into her face, and then pushed her away: she had a little break in her lip, he said, and might easily poison herself too. Then he pulled me up, bade me open my mouth and examined it with his lantern.

‘You can do it!’ he cried.

I took Ussolo’s hand and sucked with all my might. The saliva ran in my mouth and when I spat it out, it seemed as if I tasted the poison on my tongue. But it was probably only my imagination. I continued until Raimondi tore me away.

‘Now he must drink,’ he said. ‘And the more the better. All we have. That keeps up the activity of the heart.’

He reached into the knapsack and uncorked the first bottle. I heard Sibylla give a low cry as she clung tightly to my arm.

She stammered softly, ‘O Madonna—Madonna!’

And I understood and I realized that she was praying to the Mother of God and beseeching her to perform a miracle. I was so frightened and confused that I prayed with her, and even today I know that, at that moment, I really entertained the hope of the water changing back into wine. But, unhappily, miracles no longer happen nowadays, as in the time of the marriage feast at Canaan!’

Ussolo put the bottle to his lips and drank greedily—but at once spat it all out again.

‘Water!’ he groaned.

Raimondi himself took a swallow, shook his head and threw the bottle down the ravine. He believed it was a chance error and opened the next bottle. Sibylla trembled but dared to say no word in her awful dread; and I, too, was so depressed by my share of the guilt that I couldn’t utter a syllable.

Again Ussolo took a swallow and again spat it out. Raimondi took the next bottle, struck off its neck, saw that it held water too, and threw it away. Then I took hold of my heart and told him what had happened. But I said that it had been a poor joke of my own and spoke no word of Sibylla—and I am glad to this day that I acted so. Raimondi cried out that I was a criminal; but Ussolo said weakly that he knew well that I had meant no evil. He stretched out his other hand to me in a sign of forgiveness, and said that it wasn’t so bad and that he would probably be better presently. I talked too and tried to console him, but Raimondi pulled me away and exclaimed that this was no time for chatter. He took his pocket-knife, held the sharpest blade into the flame of the lantern and ordered me to take mine and do the

same. When his knife was red-hot he cut into the wound and enlarged it. Then he took my knife and I had to hold the other into the flame; in this way he changed off and cut and cauterized the wound.

Poor Ussolo suffered frightfully. But, like a good soldier, he strove to give no evidence of it. It was pitiable how we tormented him—and all in vain. Sibylla kneeled beside him and held his head and he moaned and gnashed his teeth.

At last the sergeant-major was done. We realized that we could not go one step further with Ussolo and that it would be best for one of us to hurry to Cimego and get help. I didn't know the way, and so Raimondi went; he hoped that the priest would have caustic potash and spirits of ammonia. He took his lantern and strode rapidly ahead; in a little while he had vanished.

The place where we lay was an unfortunate one. To the right of us rose a wall of rock; to the left fell the ravine, not very steeply, and yet uncomfortably enough in the darkness. The path between was very narrow. I rolled up one coat and made a pillow for Ussolo; he lay on the second one. I spread the cover and the third coat over him. In spite of all he froze; one fit of cold fever shook him after another. After a while he began to fight for breath; he gasped, and it seemed as if his lungs could work only with difficulty. He said nothing, only groaned softly from time to time.

Sibylla knelt beside him; she, too, didn't say a word, but seemed utterly petrified. So I chattered on, and told him that the torment was over now, and that the sergeant-major would soon be back with proper help. I could think of nothing else that was appropriate and said the same thing over again—I must have said it a hundred times in the course of that God-forsaken night. But indeed, it didn't matter at all what I said, since neither of the others listened. Sometimes he would be less stifled, but then an attack would come again; the dizziness recurred regularly.

Hour followed hour. The night faded and the mists crept in from the mountains. Day came, and the cold damp wind of the morning swept through the ravine. At times, when he lay quietly, we thought that he was getting better, but soon a violent trembling would overtake him again; at moments, too, he was unconscious. He had sharp and violent pains at the base of his hand; the hand was terribly swollen and the wound was a deep bluish red. Toward six o'clock in the morning he had convulsions; he raised his body up high and let it fall back heavily. Then he began to twitch in his

muscles, the fingers of his well hand curved convulsively and his legs pushed forward in violent spasms. We had trouble holding him, but he became quieter again; soon, however, the smothering would begin again and with it the cold fever.

Eight o'clock came; Raimondi should have been back long ago according to my calculation. Ussolo had grown a little quieter by this time and seemed to be asleep; so I thought it would be best if I were to start out and look for the sergeant-major. I jumped up and ran along the path that led to Cimego as fast as my legs would carry me. After about an hour I met Raimondi, and with him were the priest and three young men from Cimego.

'Is he still alive?' cried the sergeant-major.

I nodded and went back with them. Raimondi looked like a wild man, his handsome uniform was covered all over with dirt; his hands and face were smeared with blood and sweat. He had taken a wrong step, had fallen down and broken his lantern. Then he had sought his way in the darkness, had lost it, and only noticed at the break of day that he had wandered into a wrong valley. Thus he had had to go back, and only through the help of a goat-herd whom he met on the way had he found the way to Cimego. There he had immediately fetched the priest from the very celebration of the mass, and had then run back with the others.

While he was still telling me this, we suddenly heard a wild and fearful cry. We recognized Sibylla's voice and ran on like mad. Raimondi was far ahead, behind him leaped the priest of Cimego holding up his black robe with both hands. He was an excellent man; if he could not arrive in time to use his medicine he still hoped not to be too late to administer the last consolation of the church to the dying man.

But he was too late for either. When we emerged from the ravine we saw a dead man lying before us. His face was hideously distorted, the eyes protruded far out from their sockets. His right hand held his coat in a convulsive grasp; his legs were drawn far up. Before him stood Sibylla, erect, but with her body bent forward—just the way she goes and stands now. We paid little attention to her at first and busied ourselves with Ussolo, rubbed him, poured wine between his open lips and held the spirits of ammonia to his nose. But we soon realized that it was too late, and that all was over with him. We covered him with a coat and turned to his betrothed.

We asked her in what manner he had died, but she gave us no answer. We urged her and saw clearly that she understood us—her lips moved, but her mouth was dumb; she had lost her power of speech. Her eyes were dry, no tears fell, and not once in all these years—not even at his grave—has she been able to weep. The priest took her in his arms and tried to straighten her; he failed and he asked me to help him. We all helped—but she remained as stiff as she was—her trunk bent straight forward. We didn't want to believe it, grasped her roughly and used force: nothing availed.

To this day I don't know what happened in those last two hours of Ussolo's life. I have often asked Sibylla in later years and begged her to write it down for me. But she has covered her face with her hands, shuddered and shaken her head. So I finally gave up the attempt. It must have been terrible—one could read that in her face! Her features were distorted and fixed as if she had seen hell open. And this expression of terror did not disappear, but remained, and only as the years passed, as her face became wrinkled and dark, and as she aged before her time, did this expression gradually fade. Today there is little trace of it left.

But the terrible convulsive cramp that crippled her did not yield, nor did she ever speak again. We made litters and carried her and Ussolo to Cimego. He lies buried there.

That is the story of the beautiful Sibylla and her poor betrothed."

The guard took a deep breath and drank three large glassfuls of wine to conceal his emotion.

Frank Braun asked, "And was no attempt made to cure her?"

"No attempt?" laughed Drenker. "We did everything we could, Raimondi and I! When we carried her back to her native village, her old man was drunk as usual. He shouted and scolded and would have liked to beat her in his blind rage. So Ussolo's mother took her in. Later we drove her to the city, but the physician said that he could not help her, and that she would have to be taken to Innsbruck. There she lay in the hospital for years. They tormented her thoroughly with all kinds of methods and experimented around with her. But there was nothing to be done, and finally they sent her back home again—as crooked and stiff as ever. In the meantime her father died—drowned in the lake when he was thoroughly drunk again; her inheritance consisted of debts.

She continued to live with Ussolo's mother, and still clings to the ruined hut, although the old woman has been dead a long time. She doesn't need much, of course, and she gets a few kreuzers by begging on the road when the stage passes. She has become a crippled, ugly old beggar woman, but as long as Aloys Drenker lives he will be kind to her."

Teresa said, "Father is good to her too. He always sends her milk and all the remnants of food."

But the guard was indignant.

"Nonsense!" he cried. "It's you who do it and not your father. And he wouldn't even let you, if he weren't ashamed before me. I know that very well. Your father has become a miser in his old age, as all peasants do in these lousy Italian villages!"

Raimondi spat thoughtfully, but he did not answer. He pointed to the empty bottle, and when Frank Braun nodded, he got up quietly to fetch new ones.

The girl asked quickly, "Are you going to stay overnight, Herr Drenker? Shall I make up a bed for you?"

"No," said the guard. "I must start again for the city at once. Only my horse must be fed and have a rest."

He turned to Frank Braun.

"Doctor, shall I take Don Vincenzo an answer from you?"

The German considered for a moment. Then he sent the girl up for paper. He sat down at a table by the window and wrote to the priest:

"Dear Don Vincenzo:—

I thank you very much for your friendly letter, which gives me the certain proof that you are what the world calls a truly good man. But then I really knew that long ago. And I regret all the more my inability to accede to your wish. Forgive me if your uncertain presentiment seems to be clearer to me even than to yourself. You fear that I may, here in Val di Scodra, play Providence in a manner that seems to you thoroughly out of harmony with the best interests of your native village. You are no longer content, Don Vincenzo, to place whatever happens calmly into the hands of God, but you fear that I may irreverently interfere with the trade of the Almighty. Isn't it

so, your Reverence? Very well, I will not deny that I have some such impulse, especially now since you have called my attention to it again in so kind a way. God is something that heathens and unbelievers call fate—when a man plays with fate, they play God. Perhaps this game is impious and not very Christian, but you must agree with me that it is most certainly the greatest game a man can play!

And if here—though I am not certain that it will, such an opportunity for this noble activity does present itself, for what reason should I reject it? Life is not so rich that we dare despise such small good opportunities as chance sends us.

And so I will stay here for the present, and I am tempted to wish, your Reverence, that your presentiments may prove correct! My vision, to be sure, is less optimistic—or pessimistic, if you prefer—than yours, Don Vincenzo: I believe that, unfortunately, anything that is likely to happen will be very insignificant, humble and absurd, and not at all terrible in its nature! Such is my honest conviction—which may calm you a little. I will certainly do my very best to produce a highly effective performance—but that is far from easy on the stage of life. I am, alas, no master magician, as you seem to believe, but only a poor apprentice of the sorcerer’s art! And so you will probably have occasion to laugh and not to weep!

I am, dear Don Vincenzo,

Yours very faithfully,

Frank Braun”

He beckoned Teresa to the table. Then he folded the letter, gave her a feather quill and showed her the fourth page which was still blank.

“It’s to your father confessor!” he said. “Don’t you want to send him a greeting?”

Her face beamed. She took the sheet and wrote on it in large letters:

“I am very happy!

Teresa”

The guard had long since ridden away; Frank Braun stood in his room and stared out into the night. A storm had come up and the waters of the circular lake seethed as in a kettle. The waters beat against the walls of rock in long waves, and rose high as if they wanted to get out of this hole, in which they were imprisoned for all eternity. But there was no escape; the cliffs held them in that hard ring and laughed aloud over the powerless rebels.

Frank Braun closed the window and sat down at his table. It was late enough and he felt that he would not be able to work anymore that night. But he was in no mood to go to bed; so he sat there idly, gazing absent-mindedly at his books and listening to the howling and the roaring of the rain—its clatter and hiss and resonant thunder. He took the priest's letter and read it once more. Softly he murmured to himself:

“Something will happen, terrible for Val di Scodra, terrible for Teresa—terrible likewise for you.”

He repeated the words, twice, three times. He spoke them slowly, thoughtfully, almost caressingly. Then he held the letter over the lamp; the flame caught it at once. He strewed the ashes into the waste paper basket. Suddenly it seemed to him as if he heard someone at the door knob.

He listened and asked, “Teresa?”

But there was no answer. The wind raved and tugged at the shutters and the windows, whistled through the room and rattled the door. Frank Braun had the feeling that something stood outside that wanted to get in.

“Let it come,” he thought. “I am ready.”

Then he shook off the thought and laughed. He opened a book and turned the pages. But again, and now quite clearly, he heard a noise from the direction of the door. Once again he called the girl's name, and then went into the middle of the room. No, no, that was not the storm—someone was fumbling with the lock. He went to the door and opened it quickly: no one stood outside.

But then he heard the noise come from the other door, that of the bedroom, which was latched from within. He heard quite clearly the latch being turned, softly and carefully, and always in vain. He stepped out into the hall and saw the hand on the knob, and a white figure. Instinctively he stepped back and slammed the door behind him. He had not been able to

see much in the dark hall which was only lit by the weak light of the lamp. It was certainly not Teresa; she knew that that door was locked. Perhaps her father? Or the farmhand? What did they want in his bedroom at this hour? He went to the desk and took his Browning revolver out of the drawer. He convinced himself that the barrel was full, and released the safety catch. Then he turned to the door again. But before he had taken a step, the knob moved, and the door opened wide. Full light fell upon the intruder: it was Peter Nosclere. He had on a dirty shirt, soaked through by the rain; a white nightcap hung askew upon his black hair. His bare feet dripped with mud; his legs, bare to the knees, were black with a long, thick growth of hair to which the dirt adhered.

“A strange way to dress for a visit,” thought Frank Braun.

He called, but Pietro did not hear him. His eyes were wide open and stared fixedly ahead. But they saw nothing. Frank Braun took the lamp and held it near his face—not even his lids twitched. He groped along as if in deepest darkness, touched the wall and groped farther.

Suddenly he stood still. He seemed to be thinking, and his forehead became furrowed. Then he turned around, felt his way slowly back to the door and went out. The German followed him, his lamp in his left hand, and his revolver in his right. He saw how Pietro crept to the stairs, groped his way down and stepped into the guest room below. Swiftly he went after him and entered at the same time. The American crept past the long bench and felt the chimney mantle; obviously he was looking for something.

Finally he found the cupboard of household utensils, stirred around in it and drew forth a long, pointed butcher’s knife. He tested the blade with his thumb and a broad grin slid over his face. He grasped the handle firmly in his right hand and carefully re-ascended the stairs. This time he went directly through the open door of the sitting room. Frank Braun stood beside him, two paces away, and observed every movement, constantly ready, if necessary, to use his weapon first.

But the somnambulist didn’t give him the slightest cause to lift his hand; it was entirely clear that he saw and heard absolutely nothing. He stood at the door that joined the two rooms and opened it with a soft, careful pressure; then he went into the bedroom. Frank Braun followed him and watched. Pietro strode straight up to the bed that stood by the window, held the knife between his teeth, and with both hands felt carefully for the

head of the bed. The bright gleam of the lamp fell into his face and Frank Braun saw how contorted it was with immeasurable rage.

Finally he seemed sure of himself; he grasped the pillow with his left hand, took the knife, and thrust out with the strength of madness. Once again he lifted the knife high, and once again he gave a thrust, then he wiped his eyes with his hand as if blood had spurted into his face.

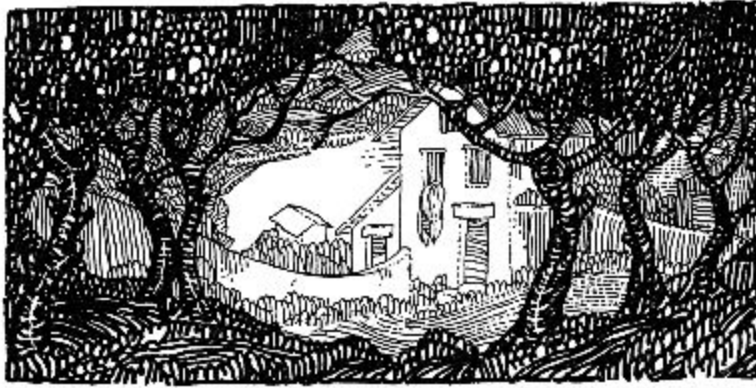
And again and again he buried the knife in the pillow up to the hilt. A smile of profound inner satisfaction settled on his lips. He took a few deep breaths, and then let the knife fall. With quiet, almost firm steps he went toward the door. Frank Braun let him pass and followed him again through the room and down the stairs. He saw the somnambulist open the house door and carefully close it again behind him. The rain beat in his face but he did not notice it, slowly he strode through the soaked lanes toward his house.

The German went back into his room, approached his bed and regarded it. The coverlet and the pillows had been transfixed; the thrusts had gone deep into the mattress.

“It is probably better for both of us that I was not lying there,” he said.

And only then a silent fear grasped him. His hand trembled and he quickly had to set the lamp down again. Slowly he undressed and went to bed.





Chapter Eight

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be Opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be Unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap As an hart, and the tongue of the dumb Sing”.

Isaiah XXXV, 5, 6



Wino wandered through the streets with bare legs, a white cloth around his shoulders and a large paper hat on his head, carrying a long wooden sword in his hand. The deaf mute dragged a goat behind him by a short cord, which carried large bells on her neck and tail, her horns and all four legs. Someone had wrapped a cloth around the goat's body and fastened a large doll on it, astride, its face turned to the animal's tail. The latter was a primitive affair made of oakum and black rags; two red pearls served as its eyes. It had two horns, a long red tongue, and a green tail; the people understood that it was meant to represent Satan.

Gino croaked out his hoarse sounds, and at the same time struck the devil with his sword. The goat bleated in terror and made the eleven bells ring loudly. They wandered that way through the village, and behind them ran the children and women. At times the boy put his hand in his pocket and distributed little handbills among the people.

Teresa put the bread on the table and went to the window.

“Oh,” she cried, “they’ve made a monkey of the poor child!”

Frank Braun joined her.

“Certainly the American has done this,” he laughed. “It’s a reminiscence of Yankee methods. He is making progress; he’ll soon be the Barnum of Val di Scodra! Don’t you see that Gino is supposed to represent the archangel Gabriel?”

Teresa ran out. She relieved the goat of the bells and the oppressive cover and threw the black devil-doll into the ditch.

“Poor boy!” she cried and petted him. “What have they done to you?”

But Archangel Gabriel did not seem to demand compassion at all; his part had evidently amused him greatly. Tears came into his eyes when Teresa relieved him of the cap and the wooden sword, and indicated to him that he was to lead the goat to pasture. He obeyed in spite of that, cast one yearning glance after the devil, and crept away.

“Since when do you play the part of village constable and forbid public processions?”

Frank Braun asked, laughing.

“Do give him back his sword.”

“I’ll give him something that he would more greatly prefer,” she answered.

She called Gino back, went into the house and made him a large sandwich. The deaf-mute boy grinned and took a greedy bite. Then he put his hand in his pocket and gave Teresa all the handbills that were left. She cast one glance at them and hurled them to the ground.

“Why are you so violent?” laughed Frank Braun.

He picked up one of the handbills and read it. On it was written in square, awkward letters:

Tonight at Eight O’clock Sharp In the Meeting Hall
GREAT SLAUGHTER OF DEVILS
ALL Christians are cordially invited.
ELIJAH, THE PROPHET

“Look, the American is coming on!” he cried. “Shall we go too, Teresa?”

“No,” said the girl.

“Oh, yes!” he insisted. “We’ll go there. He will certainly have a surprise this evening; I gave him some very good advice the other day.”

The girl begged him; “I don’t want to go.”

“And why not?” he asked. “The whole village will be there; why do you want to make an exception of yourself?”

“Father won’t be there either,” she objected.

He laughed. “Your father? Well, I’ll give him twenty crowns. Then he’ll be sure to come along.”

She did not answer, but her face flushed hotly. He would not let her off.

“Don’t you believe that he’ll go?”

She straightened herself up and looked at him.

“Yes, I know very well that he will go. I know that he will do anything for money. And I know too that he took money from you for—for me—”

Her bosom heaved and she struggled for breath. She pleased him this way, and again he brought down the whip to drive her further.

He said, “Wasn’t it his right to turn his share in you into money?”

She recoiled a step, raised her arm and closed her ears with her hands:

“Be quiet!” she cried. “Be quiet, I don’t want to hear it!—he is my father.”

“Your father is a scoundrel,” he said laughing. “And you know it very well.”

Then she broke down. Sobbing she threw herself down on the bench.

“What do you want of him? And what do you want of the dirty American? Isn’t it enough that you have me?”

He asked, “Will you come along this evening?”

She nodded. He left her alone and went to his room. He was very dissatisfied with himself and whistled angrily through his teeth. Why did he torment this girl? What would he gain by his childlike, arrogant desire to dominate, which was so empty and foolish and scarcely filled the moments as they passed?

Oh, yes, he was a Caesar in Val di Scodra. He ruled over the poisonous Pietro Nosclere, the prophet, and through him his whole congregation. What did it matter that the holy man found Frank Braun so much in his dreams that he hated him with a murderous hatred? He did his will when he was awake! With his money, however, he ruled the miserly Raimondi; with his glance, the girl, who loved him. He really was king here.

He laughed bitterly. He knew very well what he was lacking: only a little of the good, stupid, primitive faith. If he could only believe that this old, spotted rag was purple—then it would indeed be a royal coat! His will was done where ever he looked in this valley. Oh, why couldn't he believe in his own will? Just to believe, for once, powerfully and firmly, in himself and in his will to achieve. Oh, not even that was necessary. Only a little—he needed only a very little of that wild belief that blossomed and grew so rankly here in the valley.

Val di Scodra believed for him, strongly and unshakably: Pietro in his mission; Raimondi in the immeasurable treasures of the stranger. But the girl believed in his love. Three great lies— yet, were they really lies? Hadn't the great faith of the valley long ago turned them into truth? Ah, if he himself could only believe in them, just for one brief moment, then they would stand there, as clear and shining as any great truth ever did. He felt it deeply: Only belief gave one happiness. He could have gone to the meanest of the goitered beggars and could have pleaded with him:

“Have mercy! Give me some of your faith!”

A grain of belief was worth more than all one's great reason. He threw himself on his bed and buried his head in the pillows. He lashed all his thoughts together, and drove them in a pack, like a herd of cattle. He caused them to beget upon one another and to bear anew, to throw out ever new, mad images into the world.

Pietro was the prophet, the Jan Bockelson of the mountains, the king of Zion in this valley of Val di Scodra. And Teresa became a saint, at once Divara and the Rose of Lima. Miracles and strange deeds happened in this lonely valley, a witches' Sabbath began and a mad dance of all kinds of wild delusions. The whole world was invited to this play; but he sat in his box in back and pulled the wires of his marionettes. Wasn't it worthwhile, this mad game? He jumped up and called Teresa; breathlessly she came into his room.

“What do you want?” she asked.

He cried out to her, “Do you believe? Do you—believe?—What do you believe in?”

She looked at him, fearfully and shyly.

“What do you want me to believe in?”

He took her arm and shook her.

“I want to know what you believe in. Tell me everything in which you believe! Do you believe in God?”

“Yes,” she said.

“And in Jesus Christ, His Son?”

“Yes—yes.”

“And in the Holy Ghost? And in the Madonna? And in the saints?”

She trembled.

“Yes,” she cried, “yes, yes!”

“In the resurrection of the dead? And in Heaven? And in Purgatory?”

She nodded.

“And in all that the Church teaches?”

“Yes!” she cried. “In all its teachings. Why do you ask?”

But he continued, and his words sounded harsh as hailstones:

“Do you believe in love? Do you believe that the earth is round? And that this is really a chair? And that, over there, is a table? And that you are a human being? And do you believe that there is happiness to be found in this world?”

She was frightened and almost recoiled from him.

“Oh, dear Sir” she said.

He cried out, “Answer me!”

Then she said timidly, “Yes, I believe all that.”

He laughed wildly.

“Everything, everything?—you can believe in everything! If I were to tell you that the priest is coming today, would you believe that too?”

“Yes, why shouldn’t I believe it, if you told me?”

“Of course you would, and why not? I might tell you that the sun will be hurled from Heaven and you would believe me. I might tell you that a worm is creeping through my brain—you would believe that—you would even see it and catch it!”

She came up to him and gently stroked his arm.

“You are ill,” she said.

“No,” he cried, “No! You are ill—all of you. Your faith is your illness!—It is a good holy illness, and yet the most contagious one there is. And I tell you child, that I have no greater desire than to become infected by it! But you see, that is the problem—I am immune!”

He laughed bitterly, sat down on the bed and drew her to him.

“You are faith,” he said. “I will drink you; I will bathe myself in you. Do you know what a mud bath is? Cripples and lame people go there, they go with sticks and crutches and throw themselves naked into the dirty slime. And they arise and stretch their limbs and go freely out into all the world. I am naked and I am clean and I would bathe myself in the mire of faith. I can no longer walk, I tell you, and all my limbs are lame and stiff. Kiss me, child, take me and kiss me! Let me bathe in the slime of your faith.”

He drew her to him and rested against her bosom.

“Answer me, answer! Don’t you feel what I want? You have so much strong faith, you must give me a little, only a very little of it! Give me just enough faith that I may stand upon it, or only so much that I may hold myself fast by one weak hand!”

“My love,” she said, “my love! I will pray to the Madonna—day and night—”

He shook his head energetically.

“No, no, she can’t help me! You must do it yourself! You are the Madonna!”

She was frightened and her arms trembled.

“I—am—the Madonna—?” she stammered.

“Yes!” he cried. “Each man has his own God. And the God of each man looks exactly as he does himself. No one can create a God in an alien image. Your good father confessor’s God is mild and loving, as he is himself. The American’s God is small and dirty, like its author. And your Madonna is full of love—like you!”

He knelt and put his head in her lap.

“All men,” he sobbed, “have a God, in whom they may believe. Only I have none—only I—I cannot believe!”

His voice rang out like the cry of a drowning man; it seared her heart like the lightning of despair.

“Take my very life!” she breathed.

Then he sprang up and thrust her back.

“I don’t want your life!” he cried. “What will your life avail me? I want your faith, your passionate faith! Give me the power of believing in myself. Then I will be a God who can carry you through the highest heaven!”

“I believe in you,” she said.

He grasped her and lifted her up in his arms.

“You do?”

She wound her arms around his neck and covered him with kisses. But he drew his head away and rocked her to and fro like a light bundle.

“You do?—yes, you do believe in me! You all believe in me, your father and Pietro and the whole village. Even your priest believes in me. Why can’t I do it myself? Tell me, am I a king if all the world says so?”

She looked at him and a radiant faith shone from her eyes:

“You are a king.”

“And you believe in me? More than in anything, anything else?”

And then her voice sounded deep and resonant, like the ringing of modulated bells:

“I believe in only you.”

He faltered and his limbs gave way and still holding her he let himself fall on the bed.

“My beloved!” he whispered—

Her father’s voice rang through the house. She released herself from his arms and sat up.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Father is calling me,” she said.

She smoothed her hair and straightened her clothes. But he held her fast.

“No, you shall not go!” he cried. “I won’t let you.”

She smiled and kissed his hot forehead.

“I must prepare supper, dearest. If you do not want to eat downstairs, I’ll bring everything up to you.”

She whispered in his ears, “And tonight I will be in your arms again.”

He closed his eyes and laughed bitterly.

“Tonight?—No, no, I can’t let you go; you must not go away from me for a moment!”

And his lips betrayed the great pain that lay upon his face.

“Do not go, do not, or it will come back again.”

“What will come back again?” she asked.

He drew her head toward him and held it fast.

“Listen, Teresa, I will explain it in such a way that you may possibly understand it. Doubt will come again, and hell and death. I know that it will come—it will return in the very moment of your going, and devour all that you have given me. You must stay. Only then can I believe that I am alive. You must be with me; I must see and feel you.”

She laughed with quiet security, kissed his mouth and his two eyes.

Then she said, “Well, if you want to, come along and help me.”

The words came out so simply, with such ease and assurance. And it seemed to him that the space which they passed between her and himself was small and short, she spoke to him as if from his own lips.

“Say it again!” he begged.

“Yes,” she said, “help me in the kitchen then, if you’d like to!”

He jumped up as merry as herself. Hand in hand they hurried down the stairs. She threw a glance at the clock.

“Oh, how late it is already!” she cried. “We must hurry or father will grumble! What do you want to eat?”

“Pancakes with bacon!” he cried.

She let him stir the dough; then he had to prepare the salad. She tied an apron around him and carried the dishes into the guest room. After dinner he helped her in the garden. They cut the branches of the mulberry trees and stripped off the leaves for the silk worms. Her father called out to her: she was to straighten out the bookkeeping of the post office.

Frank Braun bit his lips and put his hand in his pocket:

“He is to leave you alone,” he hissed, “I’ll give him money.”

But she looked at him beseechingly; then he fell silent. She took the books and carried them to his room.

“Are you satisfied now?”

He nodded and kissed her.

The girl said, “It’s past eight o’clock. Weren’t we going to Pietro’s devil’s butchery?”

He looked at her.

“Are you willing to go?” he asked with uncertainty.

She laughed.

“Of course I will! With you!”

They went slowly, by a long, roundabout way through the olive gardens. Once she held him by the arm and pulled him, so that he went back a step.

“What’s the matter?” he asked.

She bent down, carefully picked up an earthworm and threw it into the grass.

“You almost stepped on it!” she said reproachfully.

He asked, “And you picked it up? Formerly you would not have touched a worm.”

She looked straight at him. “No—not formerly.”

They arrived late at Peter’s barn. The large room was crowded and they stood far in back by the door. The people sang aloud; no one noticed their entering. They succeeded in pushing their way through to the side; there he placed a chair on the long bench which stood by the wall. Teresa climbed on it and he stood close to her. She laid her arm on his shoulder. The hall was badly lighted and it was quite a while before their eyes became accustomed to the thick air.

The American, however, had made several improvements; old lanterns were suspended from all the cross beams, and four smoldering pitch torches were fastened in the rough poles which held the coping in the rear. Mottoes on large, white pieces of cardboard adorned the walls and beams, and their

whiteness gleamed through the turbid air. Teresa read the sayings and whispered them into his ear.

“Hallelujah! For Almighty God has assumed His Kingdom.”

“Blessed are they who are called to the supper of the Lamb.”

“The lamb that was strangled, is worthy to take the power and the kingdom and the strength and the wisdom and the honor and the glory and the praise”

“And the evil that seduced it was thrown into the fiery pitch and sulfur.”

Frank Braun smiled.

“Everything from Revelations—” he murmured. “He is going about it quite the right way!”

The congregation sang the Corpus Christi song; the piercing voices of the women sounded shrill. Frank Braun heard the hysterically stammering voice of Veniers' wife who sat up front in the first row. Many stood, others sat or knelt; directly under the image of Christ a two-year old child crouched on the floor and sucked eagerly at a bit of root, heedless of the noise around him. The musicians sat in front, in the left corner of the hall; the instruments cried in hideous discords: a triangle, a tambourine, and a concertina.

On the same bench not far from them sat an emaciated woman. Her blouse was wide open and a bony child sucked at each of her wilted breasts. Nevertheless she sang eagerly like her neighbor, an ugly and most ancient crone, before whom a boy of five knelt. He slept, his head in her lap, and the old woman zealously hunted for lice in his filthy hair. In the middle, on a low stool, her body stretched far forward, crouched Sibylla Madruzzo, supported by her short staff; somewhat in front of her sat an old peasant, who consistently began no word until the others had ceased to utter it.

A small semicircle had been left vacant around the crucifix; Pietro Nosclere sat there, a little in front of the others, Pietro Nosclere, and beside him Girolamo Scuro, his huge man-servant. Gino, Teresa's protégé, stood on the other side. But he slipped through the crowd, crept on all fours

among the skirts and legs until he was beside her. He kissed her garments and sat huddled beneath the bench. The song was finished. The American turned around; behind him a man arose and stepped out into the semicircle. He was scrawny and thin, as if sun-dried; the skin fell over his bones in leathern folds. He held the small black prayer book in his hand.

“It is Ronchi, the tailor!” Teresa whispered. “He is the one who lives next to the Church.”

Pietro took the book, opened it and gave it back to the other. The tailor took it, and drew a cloth across his forehead. He read the litany of the Holy Name of Jesus, hesitatingly, with difficulty, following the words with his finger.

“Lord, have mercy on us!

Christ have mercy on us!

Lord have mercy on us!

Jesus hear us!

O God the Father of Heaven,

Have mercy on us!

O God the Son, Redeemer of the World—”

And the congregation:

“Have mercy on us!”

He raised his voice slightly.

“O God, the Holy Spirit—”

“Have mercy on us!”

The congregation answered.

“O Holy Trinity, one God—
Have mercy on us!
Jesus, Son of the living God—
Have mercy on us!
Jesus, Splendor of the Father—
Have mercy on us!
Jesus, Brightness of Eternal Light—
Have mercy on us!
Jesus, King of Glory—
Have mercy on us!

Thus it went on, bubbling, stumbling, in an endless flow.

Jesus, Light of confessors;
Jesus, Purity of Virgins;
Jesus, Crown of all Saints—
on and on—

The words filled the hall, dripped from the walls, thronged through the suffocating air. They rose to the ceiling like the bubbles of fermentation, and settled down oppressive and stifling upon these poor peasants.

The tailor said:

“From all evil, save us, oh Jesus!
From your wrath, save us, oh Jesus!
From the snares of the devil—”

Again the congregation joined in:

“Save us, O Jesus!

From eternal death
Save us oh Jesus!
From contempt of your holy word
Save us oh Jesus!
Through the mystery of your holy incarnation
Save us oh Jesus!”

Oh, how they cried out! How they grasped at all means in order to be saved. Through the nativity and infancy, through the most divine life and through the labor, through the agony and passion, pains death and burial, through the resurrection and ascension, through the institution of the most holy Eucharist, through eternal joy and glory—they wanted to be saved!

“Save us, O Jesus!—Save us, O Jesus!”

The tailor read the invocations to the Lamb of God, repeated the Lord’s Prayer and the prayer of the Holy Name. And the congregation knelt and joined in a resounding “Amen”.

Pietro arose and asked who now felt the necessity of confessing to the congregation. His farmhand with the red goiter immediately arose. With his calloused hands he pushed aside the horrible growth and had his say—now probably for the hundredth time. Everybody had long known that he had been a fearful drunkard, whom the grace of the Lord had enlightened. Formerly he had been drunk four times during the week and twice on Sunday . . . Twice on Sunday!

He never left that out; it was his trump card! And the grinning congregation thanked him and received the confession of his repentance with fervor. His voice, made terrible by the goiter, expelled quick and hoarse guttural noises from his hollow chest; between which strange clicking sounds sprang forth in nervous haste.

Frank Braun listened to his voice.

“It sounds like the Hottentots,” he murmured, “like the clicking language of the Hottentots!”

He had scarcely ended, when Venier's wife arose hastily. She did not wait for the prayer which the American usually repeated after each confession; she hastily made her way through the rows, threw herself down before the image of Christ, touched the floor with her forehead and prayed sobbing. Then she jumped up and turned to the congregation.

"I will confess my soul!" she cried. "I have always been silent and taken upon myself a great burden of sin. Then the Lord in his wrath sent his plague upon me and sickness took hold of me and brought me to the edge of the grave. No human being could help me, even the famous German physician and his art were powerless against the will of the Lord. But my brethren and sisters did not desert me and knelt by my bed and prayed to the Lamb that I might be granted time, even on earth, to repent of the sins which I once committed. And Pietro Nosclere cried to the Lord and the Lord heard the prayer of His servant. And he laid my salvation into His hand and through His hand I recovered.

Dear sisters and brethren, today again for the first time I am in your midst and I am compelled to tell all of you how wicked I was. My whole life was a chain of sins, and only since Brother Pietro came into our village and taught us to go upon the path that leads to salvation, only since then have I been a faithful child of the Lamb. I was held fast in the claws of Satan, but His holy prayer broke the power of the evil one. Hear how wicked I was, and pray, dear sisters, for my poor soul!"

She spoke swiftly, over hastily; she sobbed and wrung her hands. Her face was pallid and almost green, emaciated by fever, but her black eyes held a heated glow.

"Pray for me, dear brethren and sisters, that my sins may be forgiven. My child, my second child, Fiammetta, is not the child of my husband, Mariano Venier. I was in the devil's clutches and I broke the vow which I made to him at the altar of the Lord. Step forth, Fiammetta, that all may see you, you fruit of my sins!"

She made her way among the benches and fetched the surprised child, who was barely eight, forth by the hair. The girl tried to hold fast to her father's coat, howled and cried, but the woman tugged her and thrust her ahead.

"There she stands!" she cried. "The living reminder of sinful embraces. Aloys Drenker, the border guard, is her father; I committed

adultery with him! O brothers, O sisters, forgive me, and pray with me to the Lamb for the forgiveness of my great sins!”

She thrust her arms high in the air and let them fall heavily on the child’s scrawny shoulders.

“Down on your knees, unclean bastard, and pray for the sins of your mother!”

She knelt and pulled the child to its knees, “O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the World, have mercy upon me!”

And the child, her hot tears flowing, sobbed out:

“Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!”

“The border guard!” thought Frank Braun. “Think of that!”

He saw how they all hurried up to the woman, how they all looked furtively at the child’s blonde head. He saw Venier, who stood there stupidly, opening his mouth wide and scratching his head. Then he heard Teresa’s voice close to his ear.

“Let us go, dearest, let us go! These people are terrible.”

He tried to make way for them, but it seemed impossible. Many late comers had entered and the room was so packed that one could scarcely move. In addition there was a good deal of movement in the hall, everyone shoved and pushed forward in order to see Matilda Venier, her husband, and the poor child who was the fruit of her sins.

“It isn’t possible,” he whispered to her. “We must wait until they are a little quieter.”

She nestled closer to him and held his hand in her own fevered one. The American spoke a prayer; all knelt and repeated his words. Then he asked them to rise, and began his sermon. He spoke calmly and almost fluently, but he gave the impression that a wild fire lurked beneath his words, ready to break out into bright flames at any moment. They were the same poor old impoverished ideas as usual: that the Lord is merciful, that He is full of wrath, too. That the Savior had given His Blood for the sins of men—and that one must help Him in the fight against the power of Satan. The power of the devil is infinite—but the Saviors’ power is far stronger. And man must go forth under the banner of the Savior and, in his very heart, fight the battle against Satan.

The old sentences flowed with a soft splashing, like water from a spout during a gentle rain. But Frank Braun felt that a wind was blowing and that a wild storm must sweep through this oppressive sultriness. He held Teresa close to him, as if he would protect her with his coat.

“Listen,” he whispered. “Listen.”

The fingers of the American were convulsively interlaced; in the dull silence one could hear his joints crack. For a moment he was silent, and then the words wrung themselves from his lips:

“God gave me a sign!”

And aloud he cried once more, “God gave me a sign!”

It was as if, with this word, he had passed the great river that obstructed his way. He looked swiftly over the assembly, and saw the eyes which were directed to him in fixed expectation.

“Just wait my beloved brethren and sisters; I will reveal it to you. But first hear something else and partake with me of the Blood of Christ in order to strengthen your souls for the battle into which I am about to lead you.”

He went to the image of Christ, bent over and lifted a round copper water kettle from the floor which he handed to his serving-man. Then he took two bottles of wine and poured their contents into it. He grasped the copper kettle with both hands and turned to the Crucified One.

“O Lord, Jesus Christ, Thou who bearest the sins of the world! In the hand of Thy priest Thou turnest the wine into Thy Blood that we may taste of it and receive Thy divine strength! Thou hast anointed me in Thy Father’s house; so may this wine, through the miracle of Thy grace, be changed into Thy blood.”

He knelt down slowly and his lips murmured soft prayers. No one spoke; a deathlike silence fell. The congregation scarcely dared to stir, even the children pressed breathlessly closer to their mother’s skirts. And only the two-year old baby sitting close to him on the floor, sucking at its root, paid no attention to him and swung its naked little arms in the air. The minutes passed; Pietro knelt and prayed.

He began softly and pleaded for the blessing of the Lord. But soon his prayer turned into a loud crying, a roaring, a wrestling with God, as if he would compel Him to come down and bless him. With eyes closed fast, he

threw his whole body here and there, contorted himself and tore his hair with both hands. While round about, now singly, now in chorus, the people cried, "Amen!" and "God be praised!"

The smoldering pitch torches enveloped them all in a thick red fog. Suddenly, with a start, Pietro arose. He swung around on his foot and with both hands stretched the copper kettle out toward the congregation. A white glow lay on his face.

"The Lord has heard my prayer!" he cried, and brought the kettle to his lips. "And you, too, you are all to become partakers of his grace. Approach and drink the Savior's Blood!"

A shudder passed through the whole assembly; no one spoke a word, but the lips of all seemed to move. Their eyes stood wide open and their heads were stretched forward. Matilda Venier took the copper kettle from his hands and drank.

"It is blood!" she cried out. "It is blood! The Lord has changed the wine!"

Her piercing cry shattered against the wall and reechoed from all sides of the room. The congregation pressed forward; Girolamo Scuro took the chalice.

"Blood! Blood!" he gurgled from under his goiter. He put his lips to it again and took a deep draught. The nearest drank; in a few moments the kettle was empty. Pietro filled it anew, knelt down and offered the transformed wine. They gave the vessel to little Fiammetta Venier, who pushed herself through the rows and gave each one a drink.

When she stood before her father her arms trembled in fear that he would beat her, it looked as if she would let the kettle fall. But Venier grasped the kettle, set it to his lips, and emptied it at one mighty draught. Then he let himself fall heavily on the bench. Again the American poured in wine and prayed for the transforming miracle. And Fiammetta ran around and offered the gift to the faithful.

The men murmured:

"Blood! Blood!"

And the women screamed:

"It is the Savior's Blood!"

A small boy refused and spat out the mouthful which he had taken, but they held him fast, poured the wine into his mouth, and forced him to swallow. Old Sibylla grasped the kettle with both hands and made the girl hold her staff. She prayed silently and took a deep draught. An old peasant woman who sat next to her, asked:

“Blood?”

The beggar woman nodded ecstatically and passed the kettle on to her neighbor. They all drank. Ever new bottles were emptied into the vessel and their contents were turned to blood. Fiammetta tripped busily through the hall, her face beamed and all pain was forgotten. She stood on the tips of her toes and offered the drink to Teresa . . . The girl shook her head and motioned her away.

But Frank Braun whispered to her:

“Take it, and pretend to drink!”

Teresa obeyed him, and then passed the kettle to him. He felt that the eyes of all were turned to him. He made the sign of the cross, and then drank. It was good, clear wine. He was about to give back the vessel, but the deaf and dumb Gino crept from under the bench and grabbed it; he drank quickly, in short, greedy gulps. He was the last of all.

“Was it blood?” Teresa whispered.

Frank Braun nodded. She made no further attempts to go; her hands burned, she nestled closely into his arms. She pulled the kerchief over her head in spite of the intolerable heat, and only her glances emerged from the secure protection and fastened themselves on the image of Christ and on the man who stood beneath it. He stood there immovably with closed eyes, his hands closely interlocked. Girolamo Scuro, the man-servant, had arisen beside him. He intoned the fasting song, and thunderously the congregation joined him. The singing seemed to grow wilder, more resonant. These sluggish heads, unaccustomed to alcohol for many months, were rapidly inflamed by every drop they tasted. It rolled like a battle song through the room:

“Wounded, pale and flecked with blood,
Nailed to the sacrificial cross,

Behold how God incarnate dies,
And brings salvation from the skies!

Jesus, do Thy pain impart
Deep to every Christian heart.
Let thy bloody agony
Consolation be to me!”

The American nodded and they were silent instantly. He sang the stanza softly, as if to himself:

“Still to bind and smite Thee sore,
Jeer at Thee and scourge Thee more,
Comes the army of thy foes—
Thou that meekly bearest Thy woes.”

And in thundering ecstasy the congregation shouted the chorus, marking the rhythm with their feet:

“Jesus, do Thy pain impart
Deep to every Christian heart.
Let thy bloody agony
Consolation be to me!”

Then he spoke hastily, fanatically, stretching out both hands far into the air.

“Brothers! Sisters! God has granted you a rich grace and given to you all the sacred blood of His Son. But he demands more of you than this mere praise of your lips, more than prayer and song! We want to serve Him with body and with spirit, and for His Son’s blood which He gave to us; we will give Him of our blood. The Lamb of God was jeered at and beaten, the

blood dripped from His sacred body under the blows of the scourge! Well, then, let us follow his example, let us castigate our bodies and give up our blood for Him, who shed his blood for the sake of the world's sins!"

He went behind his seat and with Scuro's help dragged forth a sack from the wall. He untied it and emptied its contents on the floor. Cudgels and thorny branches fell out, short dog whips, birch rods and hazel switches. He grasped a strong bundle of rods in which willow switches were mingled with acacia branches with their long, hard thorns. Then, directly under the image of Christ, he took off his coat and his shirt. ·

He stood there naked but for his trousers. His body looked black, even the arms were covered with hair. Long strands hung from his chest; he seemed like a strange ape rather than a human being.

"I will set you an example!" he cried.

He took another rod from the floor and lifted them both high in the air.

"O Lamb of God, redeem us!" he cried, and let the rods descend in mighty strokes.

They struck his back and his shoulders and the sharp thorns penetrated his flesh. He raised them up again; immediately one saw red drops of blood ooze through the long, black hair. And again the heavy black rods whizzed through the air, and descended sharply on his arms and chest. A protruding thorn hit his left cheek, scratched clear across it and left a scarlet line. His features became distorted; the strokes fell more and more swiftly. In the dull silence this whizzing and whistling could be heard through the air, and the loud impact of the switches against his naked skin. His trunk rocked to and fro, his pallid lips moved in quiet prayer without interruption. Suddenly he stopped. His chest heaved and fell; his lungs worked mightily to expel his breath. He stretched out both arms; he held the rods like palm branches over the congregation.

"Here, my brethren!" he cried. "Here, my sisters! I will give you the sign that the Lord God revealed to me. He wants to save you, all of you, from the torments of eternal death. And for that reason He breathed into my body the spirit of His most faithful servant:

"I am Elijah, the prophet!"

He leaped into the air as if he were about to fly, turned to the Crucified One, hopped up and down before Him and cried:

“O Lamb of God Who takest away the sins of the world, save us, O Jesus!”

And down over both shoulders the thorny rods hissed in sharp blows and plowed into his bloody back. Venier’s wife jumped up high from her knees. Hastily she stripped off her blue blouse and tore her shirt into shreds from her shoulders.

“Beat me!” she cried passionately. “Beat me! You are Elijah! You are the prophet! Beat me! I will suffer for the Lord who gave us His blood!”

Ronchi, the tailor, grabbed a whip and held it between his teeth while he pulled off his coat with his hands. Girolamo Scuro followed his example, his gigantic fists grasping two slender hazel branches.

Again the American turned to the congregation.

“Brothers! Sisters! The devil goes around in this world and jeers at the Lamb that gave His body for our sins. He builds his hellish home everywhere, but especially in the bodies of poor human beings. But we will drive him out! We must get at him, and if he will not yield to prayer and song, then we must take the rod and the scourge! Then he will flee, like a stench, and the victory will be ours. Up then, my brothers and sisters, sing and pray! Follow me into the battle against the minions of hell; follow him who precedes you in the combat, Elijah, the Prophet! I lead you: strike me, lash me! May my blood flow for Jesus Christ our Lord!”

He turned to those who were standing nearest him, but none dared to lift his arm against him. Then he cried out to them:

“Why do you hesitate, you slothful ones? Do you not believe that the Lord will be jeered at? Do you not hear Satan laugh on account of your weakness? Strike me, Ronchi; strike me, Girolamo, and you, Matilda Venier. Take the rod and strike me.”

The woman lifted a bundle of rods from the floor but she did not strike him. The men hesitated as well and stood there with raised arms.

Then he cried:

“You are to scourge me, do you hear? I command it, I, the prophet Elijah! My blood shall flow in praise of the Lord! Strike, strike, Sister Matilda, strike!”

The woman closed her eyes and struck, and the tailor struck, and Girolamo Scuro struck with his two heavy fists.

“Harder, harder!” cried Pietro.

The strokes clattered down and fell thick as hail. The woman howled:

“Beat me too, me too! I want to suffer for the Lord!”

The farmhand gave her a blow with a hazel rod which left a sharp red line from her shoulder to her hip. She howled out with pain and almost fell to her knees. But she immediately raised herself up again and shrieked:

“More, more, beat me more! Drive Satan out of my body!”

At the same time, with wild energy, she brought her thorny rod down across Scuro’s chest.

Pietro Nosclere cried:

“Sing and pray! Hear, brothers, the thirty-eighth verse of the seventy-eighth psalm:

‘But he, being full of compassion forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time he turned his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.’”

He repeated the verse, half singing, again and again, and the congregation repeated it after him in the same rhythm. The rods and whips beat time on the naked bodies. Girolamo’s reddish-brown skin was covered with blood. A blow of Pietro’s struck the huge goiter, which seemed to swell even more and hung like an enormous reddish blue pumpkin over the mighty breast. The tailor was thin, his ribs showed through the tight skin, over which crusts of blood and dirt were forming. But the most frightful picture was presented by Venier’s wife. Emaciated, pale from her illness, her hot eyes gleamed with fanatical ecstasy. Her arms were thin as a child’s, her small breasts hung down like empty pouches. But she raged around, leaping and dancing, and cried:

“Beat me! Beat me! Drive the devil out of my body!”

The two-year old child howled, the farmhand shoved it aside with his foot. Little Fiammetta snatched it up and, in her fear of being struck, held it

in front of her like a shield and pressed herself close to the protecting wall. Behind her someone cried:

“Let me through, let me through!”

They drew closer together and made room. It was a young, bull-necked fellow; he tore off his coat and shirt quickly in the middle of the hall and threw them among the assembly. Another followed him, an old man, and the youth helped him take off his coat. Frank Braun knew them; they were the Ulpos, father and son, neighbors of the Veniers. Each one took a whip.

Teresa did not take her eyes from the spectacle. She did not move. Only her hands pressed the hand of Frank Braun, and her body seemed to tremble at every blow.

Suddenly he heard her cry;

“Let her through, let old Sibylla through!”

She was frightened at her own voice and pressed up to him more closely. He saw how the old beggar woman was trying in vain to make her way through the crowd. She tore at coats and jackets, and thrust with her staff, but no one paid any attention to her; they all stared in front of them as if enchanted. She stood before a living wall. No one heeded Teresa’s cry; it seemed lost in the tumult of the music and in the rhythm of the prayers and blows.

But the American looked toward her and cried out immediately in a clear voice:

“Make way for Sibylla Madruzzo!”

They formed a lane and the old beggar woman crept through. She shoved herself to the very front, into the midst of the bleeding men. The singing fell silent and the arms were raised no more.

“What do you want, Sister Sibylla?” asked the prophet.

She moved her lips and pointed with her staff to her back. The American hesitated and stepped a pace backward. But the old woman crept after him, and grasped the rod with both hands and kissed it. Then he came to a decision and gave her a gentle stroke over her crooked back. But she was not satisfied; she raised her neck and turned her head up sideways. Her dumb lips moved ceaselessly.

“You are old and sick,” said Pietro.

She did not release his hand and pleaded silently. He pretended not to understand her. Then she turned around and made a gesture of writing. Someone gave her a bit of paper and the tailor took a pencil from his trousers' pocket. The old woman crouched on the floor and wrote. Then she held the paper up. The farmhand took it and glanced at it, but he could not read. Then the young Giovanni Ulpo took it and read aloud:

“You have said that we are all to pour out our blood for Christ's sake! Why do you thrust me back?”

He handed the paper to Pietro and added:

“Yes, that's what you said!”

Still the prophet hesitated. He held the paper in his hand; the dark drops of blood from his cheek fell on it. Sibylla approached Venier's wife, slowly she unbuttoned her dress in front and beckoned to the other to help her. The woman lent a hand and with difficulty disengaged one arm from her sleeve and shift, so that one shoulder and a part of her back was bare.

Pietro looked at her.

“Strike her,” he commanded.

And Matilda brought down her rod on the back of the old Woman. But Sibylla pushed her back. She threw herself on her knees in front of Pietro and embraced his feet.

“She wants you to do it,” said old Ulpo.

And the tailor cried:

“You must do it! You are the prophet!”

The American knelt beside the beggar woman. Both lay in fervent prayer before the Crucified One.

“Lord, help me! O Lamb of God, hear me!” groaned Pietro.

Then he jumped up and his right hand gripped the thorny rod firmly. He closed his eyes, and swiftly, repeatedly, the heavy blows fell on the poor old woman. Her paralyzed body writhed and turned at his feet, her lacerated shoulder shone crimson. And he struck and struck, blind and raging.

Then it happened—

Sibylla Madruzzo stretched herself up. First she knelt, then she drew herself up to her full height, and her body, which had been contorted in a

hideous cramp for thirty years, raised itself until she was taller than the prophet by a head. He stood before her, trembling; the rod dropped from his hand.

And her lips opened, and the words came forth loud and clear:

“The Lord has blessed me by your hand. May you be blessed whom the Lord sent!”

And she bent down and took his hand and kissed it humbly. A terrible silence fell upon the hall; no one dared to open his lips. Even Pietro was silent.

Then Giovanni Ulpo cried:

“A miracle! Pietro has performed a miracle!”

But Ronchi the tailor, interrupted him:

“Be silent! Elijah has done it. It is Elijah; it is the prophet! Elijah, the prophet, has performed a miracle!”

Then all cried and shouted in confusion.

“A miracle! A miracle!”

They shoved, they pressed forward; each wanted to see the healed woman; the women screamed and the children howled aloud. Then the voice of the prophet was heard:

“Down on your knees, brothers and sisters, down on your knees! All give thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ! It is not I who did the miracle; God did it by my hand! Pray and thank Him and sing His praises to all eternity!”

He intoned the Easter song and they all joined him:

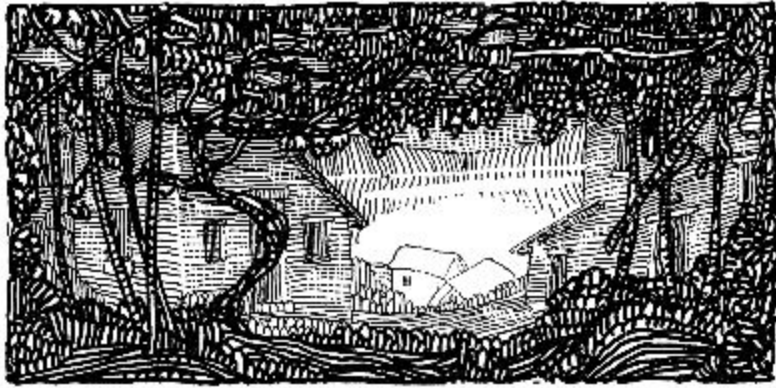
“O ocean of delight,
For Thee, O Lamb, to fight!
Satan sinks down undone,
And the great battle's won!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
As Thou didst rise from the dark grave,
Lord Jesus Christ, Thy children save!
Hallelujah!”

And the song rose as if it would break the walls and crash the ceiling into ruins and make its way out of the Valley even to heaven.

“Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!”

Frank Braun lifted the girl from the chair, and she let herself be led without any will of her own. He had to support her and hold her by the arm; every moment she seemed about to fall. Finally he succeeded in getting past the wall, and in reaching the door between the lines of kneeling people. He threw back one more look. They all lay upon their knees in prayer; only Pietro stood beneath the crucifix and next to him, very erect, was Sibylla Madruzzo. The red gleam of the pitch torches fell upon her thin, sharply cut face; her large gray eyes lay deep in their sockets. Oh, yes, she must have been beautiful once! Far behind, in a corner, crouched the deaf and dumb Gino. He had found the copper kettle and was greedily licking out the last drops.





Chapter Nine

*“Doves nest in many cathedrals The world
bends its knee in front Of a legend,the pious
blind faith Of the Middle Ages,I know it well
Even if it is poetry.”*

-Arno Holtz, Book of the Times



he cool lake breeze blew in their faces. Teresa staggered like a drunken man who emerges from a damp cellar into the street, and only becomes conscious of his intoxication at the moment when the fresh air reaches him. He almost had to carry her, and helped her move her feet with difficulty. They went the shortest way through the village; He sought in vain for a bench on which she might rest.

When they passed the church it occurred to him that one could rest there. He turned the knob of the door, which was not locked and they entered; the moonlight fell through the long panes. There were no benches anywhere, only low stools at the sides; he led her to the altar and set her down on one of the steps. He wanted to cool her hot forehead; went to the holy water ewer and dipped his handkerchief into it. But the water was foul and stank.

He returned to the altar, sat down next to her and gently stroked her temples and her hands. She slowly became calmer. For a long time they sat silently beside each other. He expected her to arise and pray. A picture of the Madonna hung above the altar; she bore the child in her arms and seven silver swords pierced her heart. At her feet lay many fresh roses, and he knew that Teresa had brought them as an offering. But the girl did not even look up. She didn't even seem to be aware that she was in the church.

Frank Braun thought:

“Poor Madonna, the prophet has dethroned you.”

He felt a profound satisfaction. This was all his work; the marionettes danced and gave the performance which he had inspired in them. The rehearsal had been held and had gone well. He was a good stage director, and meant to produce his piece so that it would attract attention on the mad stage of the world's history.

His head was a good property room; all the masquerades of history lay neatly piled up there, well arranged according to peoples and centuries. The roles were distributed now, and he would dress his dolls gaily and wildly for a carnival such as the world had never seen.

And Teresa was to have the star part—despite the prophet. Why shouldn't he charge an entrance fee? Wasn't the business of a theatrical director just as good as any other? This was a good job and it could bring in many, many millions. Ah, wasn't Val di Scodra as beautiful a name as Delphi had been, and Kevelaer and Lourdes and Valle di Pompeii? Even today Bartolo Longo was the richest man in Italy, and yet his wretched "Mother of God of Pompeii" hadn't been worth three francs when he bought her!

But he was beginning here with a whole troupe of miracle performers and had talents of the first order in his cast. Frank Braun reflected. One would have to buy Val di Scodra, all the houses and all the land. That could be done easily enough, and would only cost a few hundred thousand, and then three times as much for advertising—he would scarcely need a million; that would absolutely suffice for the beginning. To be sure he didn't have the million. But he had friends who were undoubtedly intelligent enough to give him credit in this matter. He would form a company with limited liability and with a beautiful title:

"Companions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Co., Ltd."

And this much was certain: he would only have Jews as stockholders in this Christian company, capable people that knew something of business. Then the various developments would come. A dozen large hotels to start with, halfway up the slope in a semicircle around the lake, eight for Germans, two for Englishmen, one for Italians, and one for Slavs. Should there be one for Frenchmen to? Oh, no, that would scarcely pay, the French were heathens and wouldn't come anyhow, and a series of gigantic inns for the pilgrims and a basilica, compared to which Bartolo Longo's would sink into insignificance, also a sanatorium and charming little chalets. All around

about the lake he would have a gallery carved into the rock and thereby create a circular path. Bath houses would be anchored everywhere, and the lake itself would be a great tub and fountain of health for all ill.

As for miracles—he had no fear at all! He had one that hundreds of people had seen with their own eyes! How many miracles a year did Lourdes have? And even the absurd swindler of Valle di Pompeii succeeded in having quite a good number of them! Where five hundred people believed, fifty millions would do so too—and so he would have his weekly miracle!

The industry must be organized from the start. There was the water of the lake, which one could export in huge quantities; it would outsell its competitors, the water of Jordan and Eau de Lourdes, by tens of thousands. One could plant sacred olive trees around the basilica and every leaf could sell for a crown. The little souvenirs, the rosaries and all the cheap trash for the pilgrims, would have to be manufactured on the spot.

Near the road, half an hour from the village, there was a flat space as well as a torrent. So that was the logical spot for the factory, near water power. A master mechanic would have to be brought from Saxony. The Fiave River would furnish electric light for the entire settlement; it had power enough for ten valleys like Scodra. The passenger traffic to the city would be taken care of by hourly motor cars. The pilgrims, to be sure, must come on foot: that would serve to heighten the suspense and would be very fruitful in the matter of miracles.

The takings would be enormous! A stranger could not go a step without opening his purse. There would be a fee for a general cure and a fixed price for each bath. Devotional leaflets and souvenirs would be for sale at every house. People would not live for nothing, in this holy city which was to open the pathway to heaven.

But of course one would give their money's worth! Enormous processions calculated to hit the vulgar taste, the brotherhoods of Seville newly decked out in the style of Barnum and Bailey. Passion plays of sophisticated silliness, nicely adapted to produce teary eyes and weeping; plays of flagellants which would make howling dervishes look like nothing at all; choirs of castrates, so charming that all hearts would swell in godly delight.

And a gambling hall—why not that too? Wasn't the purpose an exceedingly holy one? And would the authorities of this pious country refuse their permission, considering the purpose, provided they received a decent percentage? Ah, they would grasp the opportunity with both hands.

The Church? Oh, it would give its full backing, say "Amen" and give its blessings. Hadn't Bartel received their full blessings and he was still Master in his house? They would all run around so pretty in their Roman togas. The Church would close both its eyes to the little escapades. On the contrary, they would be happy to help in the holy work and the Bishop himself could play his little role.

The chief roles, to be sure, were already distributed. There was Pietro, the prophet, the greatest attraction, who alone was worth the price of admission. And the tailor Ronchi, who would have to be Enoch—for where Eiljah was, Enoch had to be as well. Then there was Girolamo Scuro, the farmhand, who carried all possible piety in his pumpkin like goiter, and Matilda Venier with those fiery eyes of hers, which fairly threw out sparks of fanatical faith. There was Sibylla Madruzzo—how admirable that she had been in Innsbruck Hospital! One would have to send there for her medical history, as well as procure the written testimony of the pastor of Cimego and the authorities. He would have a little book printed with a beautiful title:

PARALYZED FOR THIRTY YEARS
OR
SIBYLLA MADRUZZO
Cured by the Miracle of Val di Scodra

Her picture would appear on the front cover and on the back cover: before and after recovery—just as you advertise a hair—restorer. The little books would sell for a crown apiece, and one could sell hundreds of thousands. Young Ulpo, too, would develop by and by, and one scarcely knew how many talents were asleep among the God fearing crowd in the mountain village. And this would not be the only source of successors, of course—the crowds of pilgrims would furnish him with ever new surprises. What material! Pious persons and hysterical ones, ardent believers,

epileptics, spiritualists, idiots, fanatics, nervous patients, mystics, neurasthenics—a treasure trove of ingredients for the dough that he wanted to knead! All the little fishes would jump into the great kettle of Val di Scodra of their own accord; stew in incense and in holy wine, in praying and singing, in fasting and scourging. All their poor senses would be stung and stimulated, until the last vestige of reason was drained from their marrow.

What? Every week? He would have his miracle every day—and his village would become the greatest madhouse in the whole world. But Teresa remained his trump card. She must become a saint, a prophetess, compared to whom the Delphic priestess would hide in shame in the furthest crevice of her Pythian cave. All the pious frauds of history would have to drip from her shining teeth, and her blue eyes would be the honeyed bait to catch the simple minded of all continents.

He was to be the great ruler over all the madness of the world. He would form a monopoly of madness as had been done with tobacco, matches and alcohol! Here, to be sure, was virgin soil, scarcely trodden by mystical highwaymen who wandered about, barefoot and blind. He had all the knowledge and all the cleverness of his age, and he knew this land of the twilight thoroughly from end to end. He alone could bring its immeasurable treasures to the light. Ah, the world was beautiful and the greatest charlatan was its king.

“Long live King Charlatan!” he cried.

His voice resounded in its echoing joy through the empty church; Teresa started.

“What—what is it?” she asked.

He remembered. Oh, yes, they were still sitting at the foot of the altar.

“Do you feel better?” he asked. “Shall we go?”

She nodded and got up.

“Everything’s all right again.”

His eyes fell on the red lamp which was suspended from a buttress under the picture of St. Francis.

“Do you supply it with fresh oil?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said. “He is my patron saint.”

It was a wretched, tattered chromo. The crowned Madonna with the child appeared to St. Francis in a vision and blessed him with the stigmata of the Redeemer. In order to show all this, the position of the saint was a highly complicated one: a curious mixture of standing, falling, and floating. He bore the stigmata on both his hands and his feet; and a hole was cut into his brown Franciscan robe in order that one might also see the scar in his side.

“So he is your patron saint?” he repeated thoughtfully. “He who bears the stigmata?”

He looked at her for a moment and in that moment caught a vision of the role she was to play in his great spectacle. An arrogant wantonness and a great desire came over him; swiftly he approached the picture.

“Dear Saint Francis,” he said. “I thank you with all my heart for the excellent idea which you have just given me. You are really an excellent saint, who returns good for evil. We are old acquaintances, you and I, and were neighbors in my native city on the Rhine: the garden of your cloister bounds my mother’s garden there. And you know very well how wicked we boys always were to you and what mischief we perpetrated against the pious fathers of your order. We invented long confessions and told the good fathers lengthy falsehoods of murder and sudden death. We used to wash our hands in your consecrated water, or put toads and fat leeches into it.

And when Father Cyprian and Father Barnabas and the others walked in the garden, their rosaries in their hands, we howled and shouted and pelted them with potatoes. But when they were not there, we stole their cherries and apples and grapes—and never, I believe, did anything ever ripen in that beautiful garden. They scolded and were enraged and ran after us—but one cannot run very well in the brown robe of your order, dear Francis of Assisi! Ah, never did fruit taste like that which I stole from your garden. But now, I assure you, I will never do it again, nevermore, I can promise that. This is in gratitude for your bearing me no grudge and for telling me now what I am to do with this girl, who stands under your protection.”

He spoke very honestly and with much sincerity; and the girl did not notice how merrily the irony flickered within his words.

“What did he tell you?” she asked.

“Something that concerns you,” he answered. “I’ll tell you about it by and by. He is a kind saint and I was always so wicked to him.”

He went up to the lamp and blew out the light.

She was frightened.

“What are you doing?”

But he was serious.

“He must sleep. Don’t you believe that he ever gets tired, if the light burns there continually?”

He took her arm and led her out of the church. But she stopped at the door.

“No,” she said firmly, “A Saint does not get tired, and this is only his image and the perpetual lamp burns in his honor. Please let me light it again.”

He laughed.

“I didn’t know you were so enlightened.”

He gave her matches, and she ran back and ignited the wick again. Then she returned.

“Why didn’t you put fresh water into the holy water basin?”

But she replied:

“Who is there to bless it?”

They went through the door and closed it. The street was silent and deserted; but a confused noise of music and singing still resounded from the American’s barn.

When they stepped into the house he asked, “Do you know the life of the saint whose name you bear?”

She shook her head.

“Then I’ll tell you about it,” he continued.

They mounted the stairs.

“Go into your room,” he said. “Undress yourself and go to bed. I’ll be with you in a moment.”

He went into his bedroom, undressed, bathed and put on his pajamas. Then he knelt before the heavy book trunk, opened it and hunted around in

it. At last he found what he was looking for—a stout volume and a couple of pamphlets. He opened them, turned the pages and nodded with satisfaction. Then he went to her. Her room was dark.

“You don’t have a light?” he asked.

He brought in his lamp, drew up a chair and set the lamp on it. Then he sat down near her on the bed. She noticed the books and sighed. She closed her eyes and stretched out her arms toward him.

“Do come,” she whispered, “I’m so tired.”

“Don’t you want to hear what I’m going to tell you?” he asked.

She nodded obediently.

“Of course. Go on.”

She took the stout volume, and spelt out the title curiously: Acta Sanctorum.

“Are you going to read to me out of this?”

“Yes,” he said. “I’m going to tell you the story of Saint Teresa, whose name you bear. I will tell you of her and of other pious women.”

She caressed his hands.

“Wouldn’t you rather sing?”

He said, “No: I will not sing. No one shall sing anything in Val di Scodra unless it is the songs of the American.”

He took one of the little pamphlets.

“Have you ever heard of Louise Lateau?”

“No,” she answered.

She sighed; she still resisted whenever he wanted to discuss sacred things. But he would not let her off.

“Surely you know the picture of St. Francis very well?” he continued. “Do you know what it represents? That moment in the life of the holy man in which the Mother of God appears to him and in which he received the stigmata of our Lord.”

“Yes, I know,” said the girl.

“Very well, this wonderful grace of the Lord was vouchsafed not only to him, but too many other faithful hearts, especially to pious women. The

stigmata were borne by Maria of Mörl and Katterina Emmerich of Dülmen; the last one, however, whom the Redeemer's hand marked with the scars of His wounds, was the virgin, Louise Lateau, from Bois d'Haine in Flanders."

In a soft, ingratiating voice he told his stories. Only from time to time did he glance at the book. He held her hand and noted that her resistance gradually disappeared; she listened, and very slowly that calm, mystical mood arose in her which made her tremble in strange raptures whenever she sat at her confessor's feet. Here once more was this sweet, musical mist, which she had not breathed in so long.

He told her of Jeanne des Anges, of Sister Katrei, and of Marguerite Alacoque, who had founded the Adoration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He told her that the latter had been healed by a miracle, just as Sibylla Madruzzo had been. That her life had been richly blessed with pious visions, as was that of St. Teresa, to whom all the seven heavens had been opened even on earth.

"What is a vision?" asked the girl softly.

He answered:

"I cannot tell you in my own words, which, after all, you would not understand. I'll read to you the words of that saint whose name you bear:

'There comes about a sleep of all the spiritual powers, which are neither wholly lost, nor yet is one completely conscious of their activity. Joyful excitement, sweetness and rapture then grasp the soul; but it cannot yet go on any farther, and does not know how it is to return. It would gladly enjoy that great splendor. It is like a dying man, into whose hand one has already placed the taper, and to whom little is left to die the death he longs for; in this death struggle one feels the highest rapture which one can express. It seems to me like an almost complete dying to all the things of the world, and the soul does not know whether it is to speak now or be silent, whether it is to laugh or to cry. It is a madness full of glory, a divine folly, and for the soul a condition of the most miraculous delight.'"

He interrupted himself:

"Do you understand what the saint says, Teresa? Can you imagine this condition?"

Her eyes closed, but she opened them slowly and looked at him.

“Yes,” she whispered. “It is, like—like when I am lying in your arms —”

Gently he caressed her cheek.

“And yet, Teresa,” he continued, “all this is but the beginning. The delight of the soul in lying, as a bride, in the arms of Christ is far greater than anything man has to give.”

“And what does one see?” she asked.

He said, “Oh, it is so difficult to say. Listen to what Anna Katterina Emmerich, who also bore the scars of the Lamb, said in this matter.”

He took another one of the pamphlets, turned the pages and read:

“‘I have seen an infinity of things which cannot be expressed in words. And indeed, how is one to express by word of mouth what has been seen otherwise than by the bodily eyes? . . . I see this not with my eyes, but it seems to me rather as if I see it with my heart here in the middle of my breast; and indeed, it causes me pain in that place.’—do you understand, Teresa, that one can see with the heart and not with the eyes?”

She said softly, “Oh, yes, I understand it very well. When I lie quietly at night and everything is dark, nevertheless I see you. I feel that you are here and that you are alive in my breast. Sometimes it seems to me as if two hearts are beating there.”

His glance was almost reproachful.

“Must you always be thinking of me, Teresa? The women of whom I am telling you thought of no man and only of God.” “They were saints—” she objected shyly. “The Holy Spirit dwelt in them.”

“And how do you know,” he cried, “that He does not desire to dwell in you? Do you believe that God would ask you for permission? This is what St. Teresa says:

‘God comes when He wills, openly and without interference. Even if we oppose ourselves, He lays hold upon our spirit, as a giant might grasp a wisp of straw; our opposition does not help at all. Who could believe that God, when once He wills, will wait until the puffed up worm flies of its own accord?’”

She was frightened and there was fear in her voice:

“I am full of sins—” she whispered. “Do you believe He might come to me in spite of that?”

He said seriously, “Yes, I believe that. Didn’t God breathe the soul of Elijah into that of Pietro Nosclere? The book of Jalkuth Rubeni teaches us that the souls of nine hundred and seventy-four generations went into Laban’s sheep, from there they returned into the bodies of men—which is the reason Israel was so fruitful in Egypt. And the Lord’s favor rests visibly upon Val di Scodra—who knows whether your saint may not become alive once more in you?”

The image of the assembly awakened in her again; all peace left her. She trembled; she saw once more those wild, half-naked people with their whips and rods; she saw once more the bloody wounds in the red glare of the pitch torches—But she also saw Sibylla Madruzzo lift herself up slowly and grow and stand, healed through an awe-inspiring miracle, towering over every other man—



“Tell me more,” she begged quickly, “Tell me about those pious women.”

He said, “The Savior once came to St Catherine of Siena, and said:

‘I will fill your life with such surprising miracles that ignorant people and those bound by the bonds of the flesh will refuse to believe them; I will adorn your soul with such a fullness of grace that even your body will feel the effects thereof, and continue to live in quite an extraordinary way.’

And for many years until her death this saint took neither food nor drink. She was nourished by the light of the Redeemer alone. So, too, it was with Louise Lateau—she received only the Holy Communion and refused all earthly food. Every Friday her sacred wounds bled: all around her forehead, on her left side, and on her hands and feet. Then she saw the Lord. This is how she relates it to us:

‘I am seized in those moments by such a powerful feeling of the presence of God that I do not know where to turn; I see Him in such greatness, and myself in such smallness, that I do not know where to hide. And I see a bright light, but it is no light that touches the eyes of the body; it touches the soul in the manner of lightning; it is a light, the end of which one does not see; it shows me the greatness of God and my own nothingness. I then find myself in another world; the same light which separates me from all external things, unites me to God without interruption or any intervening medium.’

She saw the Redeemer, His garments, His wounds, His crown of thorns and the cross; she saw Him kneel and fall, she saw how the men at arms nailed Him to the cross. And she suffered with Him and fought the fight of death with Him. Then, however, after His last sigh had fled, she saw the clouds part and saw how in a sea of heavenly light the Father received His Son into His Arms.”

Teresa’s eyes glowed. “It must be glorious,” she said.

He nodded.

“It is the highest bliss that man can experience,”

He continued, “And the strangest thing is, that when it happens the most frightful suffering is transformed into the highest rapture. If you understand that, you will begin to understand why the scourges of Pietro

and the rest do not bring pain but rapture to them. You know them all very well and you can easily understand that they would never grasp the thorns of their own accord, if the Lord did not compel them to. Here, read what the Mother of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Maria Marguerite Alacoque, has to say concerning the rapture of pain.”

He sought the book and handed it to her. She took it and read softly:

“It is quite certain that without the cross and the Holy Sacrament I could not live nor bear the length of my banishment in this vale of tears. I have never desired an alleviation of my sufferings. The more oppressed my body was by them, the more my spirit rejoiced, and the more freedom it enjoyed to unite itself with my suffering Savior. The Lord of my soul never withdrew from His unworthy sacrifice, of whose own weakness and inability he was well aware. At times he said to me:

‘I show you much honor, my dear daughter, by using such noble means for your crucifixion. My eternal Father delivered me into the hands of the executioners that they might crucify me, and for you for this purpose I use priests consecrated to my service. I want you to bring to me, for your redemption, everything that you will suffer.

Thus spoke the Lord. But I now speak of the bliss of suffering with such satisfaction that it seems to me as if I could write books full without satisfying my desire.’”

He took the book away from her.

“It is in this way, do you see, that the highest happiness grows out of suffering; how that comes to be, no one can say. But this happiness, which is a union with God, rises far above all human rapture and blessedness. Everyone who learns how to experience this rapture, is in God and is God himself. When the pious Sister Katrei thus became God, she reached a point at which she forgot everything finite, and was lifted so far above herself and all created things that she lay still for three days and was thought to be dead.

Only then did she come to herself and say:

‘How wretched I am to be here again!’ But what she felt she was not able to communicate to any man . . . Would you like to experience such happiness, Teresa?”

She sighed again:

“I am so full of sins—”

Then he interrupted her:

“There is only one sin in the eyes of God.”

She asked, “Only one? And what is that?”

“Not to be in God. That is the one great sin. If you are in God, as St. Teresa was and Katharina and Louise and Marguerite and Katrei and so many other pious women—then you are free from all sin for a short period. But when it is over again, when you wander on earth again as a human being, then that is the greatest sin and it is not well to distinguish between one sin and another, which may be greater or smaller. They all vanish in the mighty sea of the one great sin of not being in God. But you will not understand it and can come to no recognition of it, if God’s hand does not someday snatch you away from this earth in the storm of His fire and lift you high into His glory.”

The girl said dreamily, “I don’t understand it, but I really believe that I could come to feel it.”

He took her hand and caressed it.

“It is so difficult to speak,” he said. “Your language is not my language, and your words are not my words.”

He interrupted himself, “Oh, no, Teresa, I don’t mean the German language. But you see, the world in which you live has a different language from that where I come from. Words are the same everywhere, but we put another meaning into these words than you do. For that reason I took these books and read to you what these women have said. For they speak the language of your Church, which has sounded in your ear, too, all your life long. In this way, I thought, you might perhaps understand it.”

She lifted her arms and wound them around his neck.

“Beloved,” she said, “speak in your own language, Even if I understand nothing, yet I will feel it and grasp it ardently in my heart! Beloved, I know that you live deep in me!”

He sat in silence and stared into space, lost in dreams.

Then he began:

“One who was my ancestor sought greatly after the highest happiness. He built a magnificent temple to the Godhead in his heart, but he forgot that

one dare never neglect the devil, who is also part of the eternal God. And the devil revenged himself and shattered the young body of the poor visionary, and delivered his beautiful soul to the jeering of the street boys. Listen, Teresa, to what he sang.”

His voice trembled and he was certain that his soul clothed itself in the exquisite Hymn of Novalis.

Fervently he spoke:

“Few live who know
The deep secret of love,
If knowing insatiableness
And eternal thirst.
The Holy Supper’s
Divine significance
Is to their earthly minds mysterious;
But whoever
Draws the deep breath of life,
From hot, beloved lips
And to whom a sacred glow
Melts the heart in trembling waves,
Whose eyes are opened
So that he measures once
The immeasurable depths of heaven,
He will feed of His body
And drink draughts of His blood
Eternally.
Who has guessed the
Earthly body’s High riddle?
And who may say
He understands the blood?
All bodily vesture is one,

One body,
In heavenly blood
Swims the blessed pair—
Oh, that the eternal sea
Were once incarnadine!
That the hard rock would melt
Once into fragrant flesh!
That sweet meal never ends,
Never will Love be sated:
Who cannot have his own
Beloved deeply enough
For his own!
By ever more delicate lips
The food is turned to spirit
Closer and nearer.
More ardent the desire
Thrills in the soul,
Thirstier and hungrier,
Grows the heart
Thus Love's delight endures
From eternity to eternity.
Ah, had the most sober of soul
Tasted of this but once!
They would abandon all,
And take their seats

At the table of yearning
Which never grows bare.
They would recognize Love's
Most infinite fullness

Praising the mystical food
Of flesh and blood.”

He spoke—and yet it was a sweet singing. Soft words came from his lips—but they dropped into her hands like the fragrance of warm linden blossoms. And her bosom heaved and her eyes saw a silver light.

“What do you feel?” he asked.

Then she said softly, “I feel as if my soul were about to flee into the arms of the Bridegroom.”

He nodded, “Yes, that may well be!”

He kissed her eyes quickly and said, “So, now you may sleep!”

Swiftly he grasped her left hand and with his fingers gently stroked the hypnotically sensitive spot on the cushion of her thumb. She resisted for several seconds; then she fell asleep. Quickly he closed her eyelids. He put the books away. He sat on her bed, motionless, reflecting and dreaming—

“Yes, it will work!” he cried aloud. “It must work.”

Quickly he bent over her and lifted her head. He pushed pillows under it, so that she might lie high; then he addressed her.

“Do you hear me, Teresa?”

She murmured, “Yes.”

He put his mouth close to her ear. He spoke in whispers, but swiftly and commandingly. He often repeated his sentences, speaking them over again more slowly and with more decision. Then once more he would interrupt himself.

“Do you hear me?” he would ask.

Or:

“Will you will do this?”

And always came the well trained, obedient:

“Yes.”

Sometimes her lips smiled, and then at other times they were distorted in fear and horror. But with her assent she received with equal gratitude and humility the raptures and sorrows of all eternity.

He stopped and corrected himself; then bent over her again to add some detail. And at the close he repeated all his commands once more, briefly and incisively.

Then he said; “Now I shall awaken you—but you will be tired, very tired. Your eyes will fall shut and you will go to sleep at once.”

He blew lightly upon her face and her eyelids opened. She looked at him, and with a smile stretched out her hands toward him. He was sure that she knew nothing of all that he had just said to her. Her half raised arms fell back, her eyes closed. She slept.

He put the lamp away and blew it out. Slowly he went to the door. And vehemently, against his will, the words came from his lips:

“Now it begins—”

He went to his room and went to bed.

“I am a victor,” he said. “I am a king. I am a god.”

Somewhere Something laughed—but he would not listen. He spoke defiantly and proudly:

“I am a god. I create. I am creating a great and strange world.”

He felt that something was rustling and whispering, somewhere, under the bed, in the corner—or in his brain. And he cried in a loud voice:

“Drive the rats away from me—I am omnipotent!”

He did not want to think any longer—not then. He wanted to sleep—to sleep at once, at that very moment. He wanted to sleep. He closed his eyes and clenched his teeth. He desired to sleep. Therefore he fell asleep.

A hundred rats crept out of his skull. The curtain was raised and the stage showed the hall of the prophet. They all appeared: Pietro and Sibylla, Ronchi, Ulpo and Matilda Venier. Where was Teresa?—He did not see her. Girolamo Scuro approached from the back—a single, huge, blood-red goiter, like a balloon filled with blood. Pietro Nosclere was a black, long-haired monkey, his lower jaw protruded far out and his arms touched the ground with their fingers. Sibylla Madruzzo was curved like a round wheel; her teeth bit her toes and she rolled around. The tailor, thin as a thread, drove her with his whip . . . They all took their stations and waited for their cue.

He sat below them, in the prompter's box. And this box was the roof of his own skull. A hundred rats sprang out of his skull. They ran across the stage and the people vanished. And the rats rustled and whispered and smiled. They smiled. They wanted to say something. But then they sat up on their haunches and each took its long tail between its teeth and bit it off. And the tails turned into a hundred long, naked worms which crept toward him. Wherever they crept, they left a trail of soft, glowing slime, and the whole floor gleamed with this slime. But he knew that the worms were creeping up to him, closer and closer. They would creep, creep—into his mouth and ears, into his eyes and nostrils. A hundred long, naked, slimy worms—

He screamed—

When he awoke his temples burned and their pulses hammered on his brain. The covers lay on the floor and the sea breezes soon cooled the hot sweat of fear that broke out of every pore. His teeth chattered, he shook with chills, took up the covers and wrapped himself up tightly.

“I am sick,” he murmured, “and this is turning into a fever.”

He scolded himself: how stupid it had been to sit for hours on the girl's bed, clad only in his thin silk pajamas! Why had he done that? Now he would be unable to sleep. They came—more and more of them, rats, worms and thoughts. There was no hole in which he could hide; he was naked and bare and all his faith had been shattered into fragments. Without that faith he was a beggar and his kingdom went up in smoke. He knew it so well now: he was no miracle worker. He was only a sorcerer, and a poor one at that.

He thought: Miracles are lawful magic performed through spiritual power. But sorcery is unlawful miracles performed through the power of the abyss. The abyss is the human brain. He was a black magician and would never learn the white magic which he despised and envied at the same time.—It alone could offer salvation with its belief in happiness.

He knew very well that there was no limit to the power of the spirit. Each human was a creation of the Lord and must have Its power within as well. Anywhere he wished to go, the spirit was there as well and there was no separation between the spirit and nature.

There was just one thing. A terrible wall of belief enclosed this happiness and if someone once escaped this tight enclosure they could never again return. Once they thought outside of this rigid wall they would wander around miserably in the void and find no ground upon which to set their feet. One could easily escape this ashlar of belief, but not even the smallest path ever led back inside.

Today, to be sure, he had thought that the girl's hand might lead him. If he believed in himself, then he was a god, and the World was his. And in those hours he had believed in himself. Now it was at an end.

He thought over all that had happened. They had been in the American's barn. Mr. Peter had done everything that he had suggested: and the success had been great and proved that the dolls would dance, and that he was a good and clever stage director. Pietro had wrestled with the Lord as Jacob had with the angel:

“I will not let thee go until thou bless me!”

And he had forced the Lord to bless him and to change the wine in his hand into blood, and by his blow to heal the paralyzed Sibylla. Everyone saw it and everyone believed it. Why was he alone not permitted to believe? Why did he have to know that the wrestling with the angel was just a beautiful phrase of the Orient, its meaning simply “to have convulsions,” and that the author of the Pentateuch had merely meant to say that poor Jacob was an epileptic? Was it not much more beautiful to let him struggle with the angel of the Lord, as all the Christian donkeys did?

All the people of Val di Scodra believed Pietro's drink to be blood. Why was his own tongue forced to perceive that it was good, clear wine? They all took the healing of Sibylla Madruzzo to be a true miracle. Why could he alone not see anything in it? Why did he alone have to be acquainted with a hundred such healings and know how easily they were to be explained away? The grave of St. Francis of Paris alone produced dozens of such cures: Anne Maria Couronneau was so thoroughly twisted and lamed by rheumatism that all physicians had given her up as incurable—yet she carried her crutches away from that grave across her shoulders. Mademoiselle de Coirin suffered for twelve years with a cancer in her breast and in her leg, and the holy grave of St. Medard healed her in a moment. Don Alfonso di Palacios was incurably blind in both eyes, but the dead St. Francis made him to see in a second. And so things had gone on for

a dozen years! The holy coat of Treves caused the Baroness von Drost-Vichering to throw away her crutches and dance.

Lourdes and Knock, Kevelaer and Valle di Pompeii competed in white magic. To be sure their miracles grew less, fewer and ever fewer in this age. And now black magic took its turn and Apollonius of Tyana became a close competitor of the Nazarene.

All the jests that the Egyptian magicians at Pharaoh's throne produced for the benefit of Moses, any traveler could have performed for him to see daily in the fish market of Cairo or the fair at Tanta. The Saidije dervishes could lure snakes out of all corners, could make them as stiff as the staff of Aaron and walk around with them. The begging Ilwanije monks plunged swords into their bodies, drove long nails deep into their flesh, held their arms in the fire, devoured glowing coals and thrust iron thorns an inch deep into their eyes. The soothsayers of Ultranghi became clairvoyant over a cup or over a drop of blue ink, and showed in it the clear images of the persons the beholder desired to see. The Indian Yogis lay in the earth in deathlike sleep for sixty days; the priests of Alvinthra caused blood to be spewed out of the air; and the Belgogs of Annan were, like Mephistopheles, lords of the mighty armies of fleas and bed bugs and lice. The Ysdra magicians of the Parsees wrote the seal of Solomon, the seven cabalistic words, on the palm of their left hand, and the names of four archangels on an egg. Then they laid the egg on their hand, muttered their incantation, and caused it to stand up, or hung it, like a ring, to their ears. The magicians of the Afghans caught their Devas in the air, just as the yellow men of Thebes and Luxor compelled the spirits of the dead, and the ancient monks of Yemen floated around in their temples and laughed in scorn at all the laws of gravity. They were all black magicians; their miracles crept out of their brains. They were mere men and each master taught his pupil.

But they could be happy, for they had something in which they believed: the mysterious power of their secrets. But he had nothing. He knew many secrets; but since he knew them, he also knew how pitiable the great magnificence of their miracles really was. And he knew very well that it was far more difficult to manage a motorcar than to accomplish all the miracles in the world. His dream now filled him with disgust; Val di Scodra, this great giant of all the fools on earth, whose king he was!

This tremendous hoax which was to throw billions at his feet! He realized that he must be a deserter from this camp as he had been from every other.

“Now it begins—” he had said.

No, it was not to continue to work. Ah, he would not even be able to laugh! He would remain as empty as he was, and even if the whole world rode along in this witches’ Sabbath of madness, yet his own life would remain without inner contentment. For he, he knew that it was all just an empty and noisome bubble! He thought of Teresa. How she lay and slept a dreamless sleep. But tomorrow that which he had commanded would come to pass . . . She would become one who bears the stigmata—another saint added to the hundreds of them!

What was remarkable about that? Weren’t there enough of that kind? And was it something so very extraordinary that he had made her that way through his post-hypnotic suggestion? The joke wasn’t even new. If it had not been performed in public, it had still been performed in the medical laboratory. Nancy and Salpêtrière knew it well, and had observed many such bleeding wounds of blood among hysterical patients. Pshaw! He might just as well have used a little iron oxide and sulfur cyanate of potassium to produce the bloody scars!

“No, no,” he cried, “I must make an end of this!”

He jumped up and went over to her room. He sat down on her bed and listened to her calm, quiet breathing. Then he shook her violently; she started up in fear.

“Teresa!” he cried.

“Yes,” she answered drowsily. “Yes, what am I to do?”

“Teresa, you are not to do what I told you! Nothing of all that is to happen! Nothing, do you hear?”

She sat up and rubbed the sleep from her eyes:

“What am I not to do?” she asked, astonished.

He repeated, “You must not—”

But he stopped the sentence abruptly. Ah, he had forgotten that she was awake! Quickly he took her hand and violently pressed the hypnotically sensitive spot. She fell back at once. And he repeated to her what he had

just said. And he commanded that never again, whether in waking or in sleeping, was the thought of that which he had commanded to emerge into her consciousness. It was to be extinguished and driven forth forever. He spoke swiftly and waited for no answer.

He almost breathed with relief. Then he quickly awakened her, let her lie there and went back into his own room. The corners of his mouth drooped bitterly.

He thought:

“Now the priest will say that I have done a good action. But my virtues are my worst sins and my greatest sins are always virtues. Ah, if I only knew the difference between them!”

And he was overtaken by an infinite pity for himself.





Chapter Ten

“What good is it: the high Priest’s prayer for rain; If the Rabbi Chaninaber Dosa can counteract it?”

*TALMUD, JOMA FOL. 53,
TAANITHQ 24.*



rank Braun threw a glance at his disordered bed. He was certain that he would not be able to sleep any more. Morning came, and its consumptive pallor blended with the green light of the lamp. Oh, this pale glimmer of the early morning before the sun was up! Oh, this cold, disconsolate light born before its time! He dressed mechanically, trembling and fever shaken. Then he went down the stairs. Where should he go? He did not care as long as it was away from Val di Scodra. He went into the guest room and wrote on a piece of paper:

“I have gone to the city.”

No, he would not delay any longer. He would go at once. On foot; he could always have his things sent for. He laid the paper on the table and passed through the door. The light hurt him and he closed his eyes. He sighed deeply and went on his way: he felt empty, full of aches, and thoroughly wretched, like this limp air which the early wind brought. He climbed up the mountains, hastily and mechanically, step by step. He scarcely knew where he was going and why he was going—he went on. It was mere motion and nothing else, a climbing and striding, upward, upward through the dew drenched bushes. There was a fog around him that laid itself on his breast with a chill pressure. It pained him to draw breath.

Then he stood still and thought. But he had difficulty collecting his thoughts and did not know what it was that he was trying to think about. Finally he noticed that he had passed by the mountain path a while ago. He

had to turn back, for this was the way to Cimego. But he had no desire to go back.

“Then I’ll simply go to Cimego,” he thought.

He did not look to the right or to the left, but ran on. Silently, unthinking, breathing heavily, he merely followed the path, for hours. Day came, but the sun did not shine forth through the thick clouds. It was cold up there, and yet a hot perspiration drenched his skin. Then he recalled that the guard had spoken of a charcoal-burner’s hut. But he could not find it. So he ran on. He saw a goat trail run down a ravine to his left and followed it.

“It will shorten the way,” he thought.

Then he ran around at random and lost the path. He crept down the slopes and descended into the valley, down again and then back up. But his feet ached and he felt sharp pains in his lungs at each breath. He sat down under a stunted fir tree. He just wanted to rest for a moment and leaned his back against the tree trunk. A white wheel revolved in his head and he fell over on one side.

When he awoke he was miserably cold. A drizzling rain fell and wet him through to the skin. It seemed long past noon and he hastily jumped up. Now he ran to warm himself a little and began to seek the path again. Since he could not find it, he determined just to go straight ahead and to keep, as far as possible, the same elevation which he was presently on. In this manner he dragged himself onward. Once it occurred to him that he might call for help; perhaps some shepherd might be near. But he forgot the notion immediately.

Weary, unthinking and worn out, he dragged himself along for hours and hours. Then twilight fell and he made his last effort. He leaped and ran; now he called out as well, but no one heard him. When it was dark, he sat down on a stone.

“It doesn’t matter,” he thought, “whether I sit or run now. I will wait here—perhaps someone will come.”

From far below in the ravine there came a soft sound. He listened intently and recognized it: goat bells. Then he cried out again, but received no answer; not even an echo repeated his own words.

“I must get down there,” he thought.

He arose, but his limbs had grown so stiff that he could scarcely move them.

“I must get down there,” he repeated. “I must get down there.”

He climbed down. It was very dark; this helped him and made him blind to any danger. He caught hold of the edges of the cliff and of spurge bushes; sometimes his foot slipped and he would slide for long distances, sometimes he fell too. Once he fell on his forehead and cut himself so that the blood came; he tore his hands and face on the prickly broom. At the bottom there were more bushes; he made his way through them as well as he could. He cried out again; but he heard no answer. The herd of goats, too, must have long ago passed on its way.

The ravine was narrow and descended rapidly; he came upon a torrent and stepped into it. He shoved and groped his way forward, sometimes creeping on all fours. Then suddenly he saw, not far below him, a few lights. He looked to the right and to the left and at last found the goat path which ran parallel to the brook. He followed it, and then emerged from the narrow ravine.

He beat at the door of the first lonely hut and begged for shelter. But the old woman would not open the door and cried through the window at him to go away.

“What’s the name of the village?” he asked.

But she closed the window. He continued, and on the road he met a peasant with an ox cart. From him he learned that he was very near Cimego.

“Then drive me to the border guard’s house,” he said.

The peasant was unwilling; until he put his hand in his pocket and gave him money. It was only then that he noticed that his garments hung from him in tatters. But he did not even laugh any longer.

“Well, I’ll be damned!” cried Herr Aloys Drenker. “I’ll be damned! Is it you? I thought I was getting a tramp of the worst sort as a lodger.”

He assisted him from the ox cart and put his hands under his arms when he saw how he faltered.

“What ails you?” he asked, frightened.

“I believe I have a little fever,” said Frank Braun.

The guard nodded.

“It looks like that to me, too!”

He helped him in and called for a maid-servant. He set the sick man on a chair and carefully undressed him. Then he washed away the dirt and the blood with hot water which the maid had fetched in a wooden pail. He gave him a clean shirt and helped him to bed. Frank Braun saw nothing but those large, clumsy hands which touched him here and there, tenderly, almost maternally, with infinite care. They were red and hard, but kind, strong hands that were suited for any work. And he felt secure and well cared for in those hands. The guard stepped to his bedside and gave him a tall glass.

“Here!” he said. “Grog! That’ll do you good. Drink it while it’s hot.”

He was not satisfied until his friend had emptied the glass. He brought him a second glass and a third and made him drink without stopping.

“It’s the best remedy,” he laughed. “You can stake your life on that, it’s the best.”

Frank Braun sank back; he wanted to thank him, but his tongue was heavy and refused to work. He stammered a few sounds; then he fell asleep. The guard was sitting beside his bed when he woke up. The fever seemed to have vanished and he felt fresh enough. But when he tried to get up he staggered and had to lie down again.

“We’ll have dinner in a moment,” said the guard. “I’ll see whether the food is done. You are sure to be hungry.”

He was—wildly and fiercely. He looked around; his bed occupied one wall of the small one windowed room. In the middle stood a table and a couple of chairs, against the other wall was a clothes press, on which two stuffed owls gathered the dust. The walls were closely hung with old swords, muskets and pistols, between which pipes and powder-horns showed up bravely. Aloys Drenker brought him some chicken soup.

“Cooked it myself,” he cried proudly.

He served eggs and chicken, and with them, strong red wine. And he was happy to see his patient enjoy it so much.

“I must ride out now,” he said. “But you must promise that you’ll continue to lie here quietly.”

Frank Braun promised. The fever returned; now he would sleep a little; now lie bathed in perspiration. Toward evening he grew a little quieter; yet

he remained restless and almost sleepless during the night. Then once more he became unconscious and remained that way for two days. When he woke up he saw that the guard had put cold cloths on his forehead. Drenker told him that he had been quite anxious and had called the priest. The latter had already paid two visits.

“It’s always the best thing,” he excused himself, “in any event! And then, too, he knows a little medicine.”

Soon after that the priest appeared, a fat, bloated man, who took snuff and squinted. He said it seemed to be pneumonia but that it was now almost conquered. Frank Braun didn’t like him; he closed his eyes and pressed his ears against the pillows. When the priest had gone he begged the guard not to admit him again.

Aloys Drenker laughed:

“I’m willing! If he’s not needed, so much the better.”

He really wasn’t needed any longer. The fever went down and with it the sharp pains in his chest. After a few days Frank Braun could get up daily for a few hours. The guard did what he could for his patient. He told him anecdotes about smugglers and never tired of mixing fresh punch or hot spiced wine. And his remedies cured; that was not to be denied. Frank Braun told him about the miraculous healing of Sibylla Madruzzo and also of the confession of Venier’s wife.

The guard burst out:

“The dirty slut! And she even beat the child?”

He was enraged, and declared that he would ride over at once and set things to rights. Frank Braun advised him to put it off for a while; but it was hard to make the guard realize that he could only do the child harm at the present.

“Oh, nonsense!” he cried. “All this damned devil hunting rot! Unburned wood-ashes—that’s the best cure for the whole craziness. I am certainly no scholar, but I know what the apostle says:

‘Shall I chastise you with a rod?’”

Frank Braun replied:

“Well, you’d only awaken their jubilation with a rod; that has become their daily bread in the Valley of Scodra.”

Aloys Drenker shook his head thoughtfully.

“What is a man to do then?”

Then he told about his affair with Matilda Venier.

“They made a fool of me, that’s what they really did,” he roared. “She kept me in that damned hole of Val di Scodra through the nights and in the meantime her husband smuggled fat bales of goods from Sanpiglio to Brescia. He knew very well indeed what his wife was doing, and I was the one who was taken in and not he! She certainly didn’t tell him any news in Mr. Peter’s barn, not him! But I’ll crack her skull if she so much as hurts a hair of the child’s head.”

Frank Braun tried to calm him: he believed that Venier was much more kindly disposed toward little Fiammetta than the mother herself. But the guard was not to be turned from his determination. He would ride there on the very next day and set things to rights in that confounded sty . . . But an official telegram prevented him; he was commanded to ride at once to Spologna, a little village close to the border.

“That means Faluppio’s band,” he cried, “the very one that Venier used to belong to. Our captain is going to carry out some plan, you will see!”

He slipped into his boots; five minutes later the iron shod hoofs of his horse were rattling along the small, water washed stones of the street. Frank Braun was alone. The old maid-servant took care of him; the guard had laid his sword on the pillow; it was to serve as a call bell. He rattled it strongly on the floor when he wanted the maid. He procured a smooth board with some difficulty; this served him as a table while he was lying down.

—He brought back a writing quill and paper and began to write again. It was a game, like all of science, and as pointless as any game. One required patience and the other the ability to decipher cuneiform writing. One constructed a logical system of his world view and the other calculated how many “A’s” there were in the Bible. God, you could entertain yourself that way!

Then, too, another element entered into it. He recognized now that his work, like all work, was purposeless and childish. But it had been begun: a chord had been struck, and it had to be resolved. Wasn’t it Zelter that had the little incident with the cobbler’s apprentice?

The boy sang the song from the Freischütz continuously:

“We are winding thee the virgin’s wreath.”

And he sang it over and over and over again, just this one line and no more. Zelter went behind him and cried out in a rage:

“Of silk that’s violet blue! Of silk that’s violet blue!”

At which the boy called out to him, “If you want to sing the song about the virgin’s wreath why in hell don’t you begin it yourself?”

He laughed. God knows, the cobbler’s apprentice seemed more congenial to him than Goethe’s friend! He was satisfied with his single line and had no further ambition; he did as he pleased and was a free man. But poor Zelter was ridden by his particular Satan; he had to spin the violet blue silk and was a wretched slave to his art. And Frank Braun knew very well that it was quite useless to resist. One had to finish, one had to, and no stubbornness availed.

He sighed, laughing, and continued to spin his silk of violet blue. The paleontologists play a game like the children’s game at Easter. Their mother, Antiquity, has hidden pretty Easter eggs for them in the earth, and now these well-behaved children look and sniff around everywhere. When their mother cries “Cold!” they make a sad face; when she cries, “Warm!” then their eyes glow.

But it is an entrancing game, this science. The Neanderthal man was found fifty years ago, and the enthusiasts cried out that here was the missing link, here was the ape-man. This was the most beautiful Easter egg in the world and was made king by the one who found it. But the envious ones said that he wasn’t a genuine king at all; he was morbid, they said, and abnormal—names which, in all ages, the stupid have given to that which they did not understand. And they disputed, and the end of it was that they were both wrong: the Neanderthal man was a real man, but he wasn’t the missing link! It was a lovely Easter egg but not the big golden one. He was not the link of transition; that must have come long before his time, a matter of a million years.

It was certainly in the tertiary rocks, and one would have to look for it there. They sought and found all kinds of Easter eggs, but never the one that had been promised them. And so, to pass the time, they looked at these more closely. All the Neanderthal folk resembled the men of today in one respect: the formation of the teeth. However, the absence of a chin was ape-

like, and ape-like too, were the huge protuberances over the eyes. Therefore, one reasoned, the creature that really formed the transition and which one was seeking, must have been more ape-like in these respects too, must have had a powerful, gorilla like snout and mighty eye-teeth.

Ah, if one only knew where that precious egg lay! Since no one found it, one reflected further and advanced a good bit. It was discovered that the normal human set of teeth was the original, and this welcome rule was found to be confirmed everywhere. The mammals had begun with a normal set of teeth and the main branch of the genus had kept it. It was only in the side branches that some special adaptation favored the development of one or another kind of tooth; the eye-teeth or the molars or the incisors. In this way it was ascertained that man had the simple, original set of teeth, and the orangutan an abnormally developed one, and therefore man is the father of the great ape and not vice versa.

And it was concluded that, if this was so, the treasure to be found in the tertiary must be still more ape-like than the Neanderthal man—but must have a human set of teeth. That is how, then, our original ancestor must have looked: with features like an ape, but teeth like a man. The sons of this primeval man-ape, however, went separate ways. The well-bred Abel kept the teeth and laid aside the ape-like features; the wicked Cain, on the other hand, developed the powerful teeth even more and, as a punishment, lost in the direction of his skull and brain.

The good children who played at paleontology painted pretty little pictures to represent the way the golden egg would look—if they ever found it; and since they were so very good, their mother called them to Heidelberg and said:

“Warm—warm!”

And it was there, really, that they found the egg, and were infinitely proud and happy because it looked exactly like they had prophetically delineated it. They found the Heidelberg man: he was much more ape-like than the Neanderthal man and yet had the simple, human set of teeth. The good children said: “Aha!” and put their fingers to their noses in derision at the others who had painted the wrong little pictures. Now the man of Heidelberg was the infinitely primeval ancestor. And from him and his brothers all the rest were descended: The Cro-Magnon giants; the people of Galley Hill, those of Grimaldi and of Neanderthal.

Ah, those Neanderthal people! How often, as a boy, he had climbed into that cave, the old ladder was decayed and broken and the rope had rotted. That only heightened the charm, for it all seemed immensely dangerous. He had sat there and dreamed that he was the Neanderthal man; that he was being hunted and dared not stir from his hiding place.

And in order to make his imaginings more real, he sang aloud the hymn of the persecuted:

“Praise ye the Lord, the mighty King of all honors; praise Him, O soul, at one with the Heavenly choirs—”

Then, hearing voices below, he broke off and thought:

“There are the Sbirri!”

But it was only his mother who was very much vexed because every climb into the Neanderthal cavern cost a new pair of breeches. Later on he had given up all interest in the pious hymn writer, but had all the more for that primitive creature whose name the poet bore. Then he borrowed a shovel and a spade from a farmhouse, or a hammer and an axe from the stone-breakers on the roadside. If there was one ape-man, he thought, why shouldn't there be more? And he dug and sought zealously after the golden egg.

He found nothing at all and stopped sadly when twilight fell. But he remained in his cavern when the shadows grew long and his little wax candle flickered restlessly. He always looked at the narrow fissure in the side walls; no human being could force his way through, but one could throw stones far inside. And he imagined that this cleft was infinitely long, and that one could creep along it for many hours into the bowels of the earth. Then it opened and grew more spacious and ended in a gigantic cavern. And from out of this cavern one emerged into a deep valley.

This was round like an ancient crater, and the cliff walls spanned it like a roof and grew pointed in the form of a cone; only in the middle a hole showed the blue sky. Beneath it was a small lake; mighty blades of razor grass grew on its shores and forests of ferns extended to the slopes. Here the Neanderthal people dwelt. They had remained for thousands of years, fishing and hunting and fighting for their lives with the mighty saurians. Ah, if one could only get through that cleft some day! Frank Braun drew strange things on his paper with an unskilled hand. He had to write under

each figure what it was meant to represent, or he would not have recognized it himself.

So he wrote “Brontosaurus” and “Plesiosaurus” and “Neanderthal.” But he found after all this time, that one of his primitive folk bore an extraordinary resemblance to Pietro Nosclere, and that the other was not unlike Girolamo Scuro. Only the farmhand’s set of teeth was stronger—he had departed from the type and become more ape-like.

The guard stayed away for four days. Frank Braun lay in bed writing and dreaming. And he enjoyed this quiet happiness of being a convalescent without really being ill. At intervals he got up and went slowly through the streets of the old village. When the guard came back he was leaning out of the window.

“Well, did you make a good haul?” he called out to him.

Aloys Drenker jumped from his horse.

“Oh, pshaw!” he growled. “We lay in the rain for four nights just for nothing, absolutely nothing! Those fellows got wind of something—and we didn’t see so much as a louse. But we’ll get them yet!”

Frank Braun remained a few days longer with his host. He felt quite well again, but the guard didn’t want to let him go; he said one shouldn’t interrupt one’s cure before the proper time. And he filled him with wine and punch and, out of comradeship, partook vigorously of these excellent medicines. One morning early, he came to Frank Braun’s bed.

“Now,” he said, “if you want to, you can ride with me. I have to go to the city and can take you along.”

Frank Braun hurried to get up; the maid brought him his breakfast. The horse was tethered in front of the house, but he did not see the guard.

“Where is Herr Drenker?” he asked the maid.

“Gone ahead,” she said. “I was to tell you that you were not to hurry and to breakfast in quiet; you will catch up with him by and by. He is waiting for you. His horse knows the way.”

He rode slowly up the mountains; only after a full hour did he overtake the guard, who was afoot and gasping mightily.

“Well, where is your horse?” he asked in astonishment.

Drenker laughed.

“You are sitting on it. I am traveling on foot.”

Frank Braun wanted to dismount, but the guard would not allow it. He took the horse by the bridle and led it.

“Well, old beast, you’ll be quite satisfied to drag fifty kilograms less than usual up the mountain. But don’t worry! By the time we get to Val di Scodra I’ll be lighter by some kilograms too.”

He gasped and sweated, but he took great strides in his heavy boots.

“It would be a fine thing if an old Emperor’s Rifleman couldn’t climb these hills anymore! We went on many different marches, I assure you, and in full field gear.”

They rested under the peak of Peldo; then they went on. On the road above the Scodra valley Frank Braun dismounted and the guard lifted himself into the saddle. They shook hands with each other.

“Give my regards to that damned hole!” the guard laughed. “I’ll be there within a few days and you’ll see then how I show those good people what’s what.”

Then he rode away. Frank Braun sat down on the stone on which Sibylla was accustomed to sit. And so he was going back once more to the valley of Scodra. To where he had fled almost five months before—to a quiet hiding place in which he was to be lost. And then once more he had fled, fled from himself. Ah, even in this most remote corner the enemy had found him. What more did he want in the village? He must drive away by the next stage. Every stone reminded him of his wretched defeat. Away! Just pack his trunks and get away! Anywhere—the devil hunters—? How indifferent they were to him. And he had wanted to play a part in this affair?

Teresa?—Ah, well, Teresa—slowly he climbed down. Were they still shouting? He heard the dissonant sounds of the American’s music and recognized the fasting song.

“Always—the fasting song,” he thought. “Can’t they sing anything else at all?”

But the noise did not come from the barn; it came from below, close by the lake. Were they going in a procession? He hurried his steps. Now he saw that they were all standing around Raimondi’s house. Men, women, and children stood in a semicircle. The tailor, Ronchi, stood on a table and

led the music; at his feet little Fiammetta Venier was playing. He made his way through the crowd but no one paid any attention to him.

“What is it?” he asked hastily.

But they went on singing. In the doorway he met young Ulpo and grasped his arm.

“What’s going on here?” he asked.

The fellow looked at him in astonishment.

“Going on? We are adoring the Saint!”

Then he ran out. The people stood thickly packed on the steps. In the guest room, Raimondi was filling large glasses with milk and raspberry juice, handing them around, and receiving nickel coins in exchange.

“Where is Teresa?” he called out to him.

Raimondi looked up, did not understand, and nodded blankly. But a woman who stood in front of him gave him a look of hatred and said:

“Saint Teresa is upstairs.”

With difficulty he made his way upstairs.

“Let me through!” he begged. “I must see her.”

Some paid no attention to him but kept the places they occupied and continued to sing; but others crowded together as well as they could. He pushed and shoved; he had to fight his way through foot by foot. The singers fell silent. He now heard only a soft prayer and recognized Pietro’s voice. He spoke in a low tone, almost whispering, and Frank Braun understood only isolated phrases:

“Gratitude to the Lamb,” he heard and “A new wonderful grace,” and “The finger of the Lord.”

“Let me through!” he hissed. “Let me through!”

At last he stood before her door. The room was packed with people; but they were all kneeling, so that he could easily look across them. The room looked like a small chapel; in addition to the picture of the Madonna, there hung a picture of St. Francis on the other side, large candles burned beneath both. The window was closed and was hung with white cloths which, supported by laths, bent forward into a kind of canopy. Teresa rested

under it on a chaise lounge of wicker. The light was rather dim, so that it took some time for his eyes to become accustomed to it.

He saw the girl half sitting, half reclining, her eyes rigidly fixed on the crucifix which the American held in front of her. A white garment covered her entire body; her hands lay on the two arms of the chair, her naked feet rested on a footstool beside which the dumb Gino was crouching, and Frank Braun saw the great, red stigmata upon her hands and feet.

Pietro Nosclere knelt down, bowed his head and devoutly kissed the bloody scars upon her feet. He was followed by old Ulpo and the latter by Matilda Venier. They all pressed forward violently, but Girolamo Scuro kept order and pushed them back. He let the people approach from the left, one by one, and then withdraw toward the right. There arose a pushing and a shoving, but finally the crowd became orderly; many had to leave the house, so that a path could be formed in the hall and on the stairs. Now they went in a long single file through the house door, up the stairs, across the hall and into the room, in order to kiss the feet which bore the wounds of the Lord. Then they went back, down the stairs and out, pushing slowly, with infinite patience.

Frank Braun felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned around and saw Angelo with the key to his room. Quickly he slipped through the crowd, opened the door and entered. There everything lay just as he had left it two weeks ago; not a book seemed out of place. He went to the window and looked out into the evening. The crowd stood below, waiting in file, for a chance to enter.

The blood rose hotly to his temples and his thoughts became confused. He saw that something extraordinary had happened; through him? In spite of him? He did not know. But it had happened and was a great fulfillment. It was a miracle that promised many others. He sat still and heard the low prayerful song of the people. But he did not grasp the words and it was only a dull falling and rising of sound which lulled him strangely to peacefulness. He sat still for a long time. A comforting warmth filled his heart and his eyes glowed and his lips spoke fervently:

“Ah, my beloved bears the stigmata of the Lord.”

Then he saw a movement outside. They all came out of the house and drew back; the tailor Ronchi and Giovanni Ulpo ordered them. No one spoke a loud word, but all eyes were fixed in suspense on the door. Slowly

and carefully they carried out the chair on which Teresa rested. Four long poles were placed under it in the form of a cross, so that their ends protruded an equal distance, and eight young lads took the burden on their shoulders. In this way they wandered off in a soundless procession. Frank Braun looked after them, and then he hurried down the steps. He ran through a side street and took up his position by the church in order to see them pass. The children ran ahead, then rushed back and again stood there for a moment looking around.

Then the crippled cobbler, Lucilio Ratti, the village policeman came; he wore his old leather helmet with a tall cockade and carried his short, polished saber across his shoulder. Next to him and twice his height, walked Scuro. The nine men and seven women of the band followed them under the leadership of the tailor—but they did not play, and walked quietly and silently like all the others. Behind them went Pietro Nosclere accompanied by two old men. Then came the eight lads who carried Teresa's chair.

She held a crucifix in her lap and her eyes were closed tight. Gino ran beside her with a little footstool, his left hand holding an end of her garment. Behind her came the women in a long procession, then the men. He looked after them. They went past the church, turned to the right, and proceeded to Pietro's meeting hall. Slowly he walked home.

At the stable door he met Angelo, who asked, laughing:

“So you are back again, sir?”

“Yes,” said Frank Braun, “as you can see.”

He wanted to ask him what had happened, but he remembered that Angelo—was not from hereabouts.

So he only said, “Well—and you don't pay attention to anything?”

Angelo grinned.

“What should I pay attention to?”

Frank Braun went into the house and found the inn keeper in the guest room counting his takings. He sat down beside him.

“Now tell me, Raimondi; what has been going on here since I left?”

The landlord poked around in a drawer and got out a bill.

“You weren't here,” he said, “but you didn't give notice. I had the room locked at once. No one has been in it. I had to keep it vacant for you.

Otherwise: I might easily have rented it to some other stranger—”

Frank Braun put his hand in his pocket.

“Don’t bother any further!” he cried. “I am perfectly willing to pay. How much do you want?”

He threw the money on the table. The inn keeper counted it and sighed—why hadn’t he asked more?

“Business is good, it seems?” asked Frank Braun. “The people are coming to you again?”

Raimondi nodded.

“It was a hard struggle. When that thing happened to Teresa, they came streaming back to the house, but no one wanted to eat or drink anything. So I declared to the American that I would not let anyone in at the door who did not order something. He preached to me at length, but I remained firm. And so we agreed. They don’t drink wine here, these devil hunters, but they must order milk and fruit syrup. In addition, the American gets a quantity of wine through me which he uses for the Lord’s Supper.”

He shoved the money into an old leather bag, put it into a drawer and turned the key.

“If it goes this way every day I’ll be satisfied.”

Frank Braun said, “Well, you don’t drink raspberry juice, do you? Go into the cellar and fetch a couple of bottles of Vino Santo. We’ll drink and you must tell me the whole story.”

When their glasses were filled Raimondi lit his pipe.

“What am I to tell you?” he said. “Teresa has just gone and become a saint. I’m agreeable—it seems to be profitable at least.”

He spat in a wide arc. Frank Braun stared at him. It’s profitable! But hadn’t he too, regarded the miracle valley of Scodra from that point of view? To be sure, he hadn’t intended to content himself with selling milk for pennies! And wasn’t this point of view the correct one?

Money, money, that was the great force which nothing could resist. And if he could draw endless treasure out of this gold mine would he not himself finally be able to believe in the omnipotence of his wealth? If the wildest of his whims were no longer to meet any barrier—would not the omnipotence of his money then really become his own?

And wouldn't he then reach the point of even believing in himself? This wretched peasant miser gathered in the pennies that a strange chance brought him. He, however, had sown the seed: now the trees were in full bloom. Why shouldn't he pluck the fruits? Undoubtedly he had deceived himself in thinking that the thing itself would satisfy him. There might be amusing details, but the whole huge swindle would scarcely touch him and his first enthusiasm was a mere childish blaze of straw. Not for one moment would he be able to believe in his great sorcery.

But what merchant, after all, had faith in the mission of his firm? At festive banquets, to be sure, the shipbuilder might chatter in admirable boasts concerning the net of his lines which spanned the world, united nations and carried the fame of his country into the farthest zones. But in reality he was indifferent to all that; the man wanted to earn money, and his shareholders wanted their dividends. That was their faith! He knew a good many people who were very skillful at making millions. But he didn't know a one who knew how to spend them well! That was far harder. And he, oh, surely, he would be able to do that. Yes, there was a kingdom in that, too. He would—he would . . . He recollected himself and shook off his dreams.

He took up his glass:

“Drink, Raimondi, and tell me about it.”

The inn-keeper drank.

“Yes, sir,” he began, “it is not easy to tell. On the day on which you left, nothing had happened, or at least I observed nothing. I found your note on the table and went upstairs immediately and locked your room.”

He interrupted himself.

“Oh, I believe your bed hasn't been made yet!”

“I haven't even looked,” Frank Braun answered. “Teresa usually made it up; didn't she go into my room again?”

The old man shook his head.

“No, she hasn't been there. I had the key in my pocket and she didn't even ask for it. I'll have to make the bed myself now.”

He was going to get up, but Frank Braun restrained him.

“There is plenty of time for that,” he said.

“I'll have to hire a maid,” Raimondi growled, thoughtfully.

“Angelo is no good for any inside work. He’s only capable in the field and in the stable. And I can’t count on Teresa any longer now. I want to establish a bar in front of the house, too, because only a part of the people can get in; it will pay. I have thought of fat Maria, Ulpo’s daughter—but it will be better if I don’t take a girl from this village. They think of nothing but their pious nonsense. I’ll drive to the city and hire a real knowing wench, an impudent one who won’t be so easily infected by these psalm singers.”

Frank Braun grew impatient.

“For heaven’s sake, hire whoever you want to, Raimondi, but tell me about it!”

The landlord sucked at his pipe and spat thoughtfully.

“All right, sir, as you please. As I said, nothing happened on that day. Teresa came down very late and I scolded her. But she didn’t answer, did her work as usual and kept silent.”

“Didn’t she ask after me?”

“No, sir. I told her that you had gone away for a few days but she didn’t ask where. She didn’t speak of you once the whole time.”

He looked at Braun watchfully; then he went on:

“That is to say—she really didn’t speak at all, at least not to me—only to those brethren and sisters. In the evening she went there, to Mr. Peter’s hall—for they have big meetings there every evening now, and Teresa goes every evening. She came back late—even later than with you the night before—but I was lying awake and heard her come up the stairs. The next day passed the same way; only she worked very little and mostly stayed in her room and read.”

Frank Braun asked, “What did she read?”

“I don’t know,” said the landlord. “I paid no attention to it. I called her to do some work, and since she didn’t hear I went to fetch her. She sat there on her bed and read so eagerly that she didn’t even hear me enter. In the evening she joined the devil hunters again. That’s how it went the next day and the next—until Friday.”

“Until Friday?”

“Yes, it happened on Friday. She didn’t come down, and when I finally went to look for her I found her sick in bed. I asked what I could do for her, but she didn’t answer and merely shook her head. So I let her be. What happened then I don’t know; I sent up Angelo with her dinner, but she refused it. Finally, toward evening, I heard her call him. I thought she wanted to eat then, but she sent him for the American. He came and stayed with her for over an hour.

Then he came down and made me a long speech, but I didn’t understand much, because he spoke too softly. I asked if he wanted to order something and then he began to shout. Well, it ended by my kicking him out. But at the end of fifteen minutes he came back, and with him came Venier, Ronchi, the Ulpos and others. There were several women with them too. I didn’t want to let them in and kept the door locked; but Girolamo Scuro cried that he would break the door. He said that I was imprisoning their sister and that she must be liberated.

Finally the American acted as a mediator and said that they would all drink something—if I had some milk. Then I opened the door and gave them milk. They all immediately ran up the stairs, and I followed them. Teresa was lying on her bed—she was ill, that much was certain.

They showed me her hands which bled gently on both sides, as if they had been pierced by a needle. And it was the same thing with her feet. I went down and got some sublimate and some surgical cotton. The psalm singers didn’t want me to, but I washed the wounds; they wouldn’t, of course, let me bandage them, but I bandaged the wound in her side in spite of their protest. The wounds, by the way, are not dangerous and not deep at all; only the skin is injured and oozes a little blood. That’s about all.”

Frank Braun asked, “And what happened on the next day?”

“On the next? Nothing special. The wounds remained. Otherwise she grew better. She got up but stayed mostly in her room. The American, whom they now call the prophet Elijah, with the help of several women, rearranged her room, and now they drag the whole crowd here every evening. After that they all proceed to the meeting hall and there Teresa performs some extra tricks for them. Well, I’m agreeable, as long as it brings custom into the house.”

Frank Braun bit his lips in order not to burst out; this father seemed so repulsive to him.

“What kind of tricks?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” the landlord growled, “and I don’t want to know anything. I don’t give a damn. She can go about her follies alone.”

Frank Braun looked at him sharply:

“Look here, Raimondi, what’s your real opinion about these strange wounds of your daughter’s?”

Again the landlord spat.

“Real opinion?—Oh, well, I haven’t any! I want no dealings with the whole business. They are to leave me alone. I want to sell my wine—or milk and fruit syrup, if the devil hunters like that better—then there’s the end to it!”

He laughed broadly.

“But I’ll tell you one thing: I was a soldier for fifteen years, and I know how many fellows hack off one joint of their thumb or index-finger in order to escape service. Or they boil a mixture of cinquefoil and laurel leaves—it’s a favorite method, especially in our mountain valleys. Then when they come to be examined, their eyes stare, and their hearts work like steam engines. But our doctors are pretty sly and not easily taken in by such swindlers.”

Frank Braun got up. The landlord disgusted him more and more.

“And you suspect your daughter of such an action?”

He didn’t wait for an answer but hurried out. He ran up the stairs and opened Teresa’s room. The air was sultry, heavy with incense and the odor of dirty, perspiring people. He forced himself behind the canopy, opened the window wide and let a good draught blow through. All the furniture had been moved out into the hall; only the bed still stood close by the door, and beside it one small chair. He saw his books lying there. He took them up and turned their pages; everywhere he found little pictures of the saint’s used as bookmarks. It was obvious that Teresa had read the books zealously; here and there he found little marginal remarks scribbled by her hand in pencil.

Oh, yes, she had prepared herself—even if somewhat differently from the way her father believed. He sat down on the bed and thought intently. Here he had sat before he went away; here he had dropped the first poison

into her heart. Poison? Was it poison because it issued from his lips? Was it not possible that he offered her supreme happiness? That was how he had spoken to her—and can't one speak truths which, they themselves regard as lies? Or, rather, a thing may be a lie and a truth at the same time, even as virtue and sin are one thing. A lie to him, a truth to another: and yet one.

How had it come about? How did his wild lies assume a form and rush forth, living and strong, full of abysmal power? He pondered. He had spoken to her for a long time about all the saints, of their lives and miracles. He had read to her and told her of ecstasies and of visions, and of the strange grace of the stigmata. Her soul had been stirred up by all she had heard and seen in the American's hall, and had very certainly become receptive to everything miraculous. And her faith, always great and strong, then grew into the immeasurable through her love of him, and through all the unheard of things that her eyes had seen and her ears heard.

Oh, surely—her body was well prepared for any miracle. Then he gave her his suggestion and she accepted it. She was hypnotically sensitive and hysterical enough, and he had not doubted for a moment that she would do everything he had commanded. But then he had put her to sleep again and had revoked all that! He had abrogated his commands and told her to forget everything, in waking and sleeping. It was to have been quenched and annihilated from her memory and never more to gleam in the still ashes of consumed recollection. He recalled that she had not answered.

Oh, yes, he knew instances enough in which an excellent medium, at other times a mere puppet in its master's hands, suddenly refused to carry out some command wholly opposed to its innermost feeling. He also knew other rare cases in which a post-hypnotic command, once given, took firm root in the brain of the medium and could not be pushed out by any new suggestion. Might it not be that way here? Might not the girl have carried out this command that profoundly appealed to her—even against his later will?

But what had happened was, under these circumstances, different from his suggestion. What Raimondi had told him did indeed contain his thought in large quantities, and yet differed in all the details. It was much quieter and simpler and completely lacking in the mad flourishes and arabesques of his imagination. No, no,—the way it was now, it was not his work! What remained of his was the thought. But another had built the temple. Another!

Teresa herself. A miracle? No, it wasn't even that. To be sure, she stood quite on the same level now with Maria of Mörl, with St. Teresa, with Katterina Emmerich, with Marguerite Alocoque and with Louise Lateau—with all the sainted women of whom he had told her. At the bottom there was very little difference; only one small word needed to be changed, auto-suggestion instead of suggestion from without. That was all. Yes, that was all. But was that really all?—all? Hadn't she done the monstrous? Hadn't she fanned the flame of her fervent faith to such a fire that it leaped from her brain and burned brightly before the eyes of all?

He bit his nails nervously. He held the secret in the palm of his hand and yet he could not seize it. He understood the growth of this miracle to its ultimate expression—and simply because he understood it, it had to remain barren forever. He could work until he wore himself out creating something in his brain, giving it life, passion and power—yet it would always still be locked up in his skull and never come out to become a thing in its own right. There was a strong boundary—and only belief could carry it across.

But she crossed this boundary with a light tread. Wherever he penetrated this mysterious new land it was bright and thoroughly known to him, but she remained in the unconscious and wandered into that which lay beyond with the security of sleep. When he wanted to gaze beyond the narrow boundaries of nature he had to dig into foreign brains: only there could the miracle blossom which she created.

And so he ran in a circle, for all the unearthly became of the clearest earthliness under his sharp eye. But she created in blindness and walked in the dreamland of all mist. She carried the entire unconscious into life and thus her life became supernatural in the midst of the earthly. That was her past.

That was it: she had no soul. She was lacking in the full consciousness of the antithesis between the ego and the external world: so she was one with all the Not Herself, and therefore she was in God—in truth she herself was God. That was the solution of the mystery: the old eternal truth of the mystic. Truth? Surely not for him! But although it remained a great lie to the cognitive intellect, it remained no less a truth for him who believed. And she believed. It was her truth. She was one with God. And so the miracle took place . . .

One hour passed after another; he heard the clock in the guest room strike heavily. Night had fallen, and yet he was sitting on her bed. Then he heard voices and footfalls in front of the house; he stood up hastily and went over into his room. He heard the door open and close; went to the window and saw people going home. He recognized no one. But now the sound of steps came from the stairs; he stood in the doorway and listened. Two were walking there.

He recognized the girl's tread. Who was the other? They did not speak, but he heard them opening the door of her room. Both went in. And neither came out—who was the other? Frank Braun trembled. He gnawed his lips and stamped his feet. He ran through the room with long strides. The devil, how did it concern him who the other was? Was he perhaps jealous of Teresa? He laughed. He went to the table, lit a lamp and sat down.

But he could not endure that for long. Who was with the girl? Who stayed with her by night? Pietro Nosclere? The blood rose in his temple. Him? He laughed bitterly. So it was for this that he had played with fire, to roast the prophet's chestnuts for him! It was for this that he had drawn the storms from heaven that in their fog this stenchful psalm singer might kiss her sweet body with his slimy lips! Was that the banal end of his mighty dream? He ran out and rattled violently at the door-knob. It was locked; he beat against it with his fists.

“Open!” he cried. “If you don't open I'll break in the door.”

He heard a gentle whispering, but nothing stirred.

“Open!” he roared. “Open!”

Still there came no answer. Then he hurled himself against the door. The lock was broken out of its socket, one more thrust and the door flew open wide. Two large candles were burning. In their light he saw Teresa lying on the bed, her hand clasping the crucifix. On the floor, at the foot of the bed, crouched little Gino. Her glance met his.

“What do you want?” she asked softly.

Frank Braun did not answer. He closed the door as best he could and then staggered to his own room.





Chapter Eleven

*“To whom time is like Eternity and
eternity is Like time, he is become
Free From all troubles.”*

-Jacob Böhme



Hhe late September sun burned the valley. The lake steamed and the naked cliffs reflected the glow. The grass shriveled on the stones and men crept wearily around in this seething kettle. Frank Braun was still in Val di Scodra. He had sent his boxes and trunks to the city; they were in storage on the pier; so they would be at hand the moment he arrived there and wanted to leave. This gave him a certain feeling of security. Now he could get away at any moment. But he loitered from day to day. Several times he tried to be alone with Teresa; she did not exactly avoid him, but she did not meet his wishes in any way. And she was always surrounded by the devil hunters. The dumb boy seemed to cling to her garments.

Early in the morning Pietro Nosclere came, usually in the company of several others. A young girl, Carmelina Gaspari, a cousin of the Venier woman, was around her all day; she attended to her room, which Teresa scarcely left any longer. Late in the afternoon the whole village would assemble, and finally they would proceed, under her leadership, to the prophet's hall. No one seemed to pay any attention to Frank Braun; instinctively, quite without discussing it among themselves, they kept apart from him. Formerly, everyone had greeted him respectfully on the streets; the children ran after him to get a kreuzer, the women and girls peeped at him out of doors and windows and the men begged for a cigarette. It seemed an honor if he spoke to them.

Now they scarcely saw him. They greeted him if he passed by and could not be avoided, but most stepped aside or talked loudly to someone else in order to seem not to notice him. Raimondi still abased himself before the power of his money, but a poorly concealed contempt lay in his

eyes; the American avoided him shyly, whenever he saw him. And in the village a silent hostility and hidden hatred slumbered.

Only Angelo, the farmhand, seemed unchanged. He laughed and grinned a broad grin like a timid animal that had been beaten often, who knew that he had nothing to fear here. Friendly enough—and yet without losing a final timidity: maybe even he would strike someday, after all. He hid his head in the sand; he did his work and slept and fed, and all these things didn't concern him. Sometimes, in the evening, Frank Braun would present him with a bottle of wine; then he went into the stable, lay down on the straw next to the goat, and drank.

Even the children avoided him. When he called out to Fiammetta Venier to untie the boat, she ran away. A four-year old boy, the cobbler Ratti's child, begged, and he gave him a few copper coins. But his sister struck the money out of his hand, seized his arm and ran away with him.

In this manner the thought germinated in the valley:

“He is a stranger!”

It broke out simultaneously everywhere, grew like a flood, and covered the broad plain:

“He doesn't belong to us; he is a stranger.”

And then it ate in like an acid—he was a stranger and an enemy. Everyone knew of his relations with Teresa. Formerly they had accepted them as a matter of course, and the young wenches had envied her. But now she was a saint—and the peasants felt he had defiled her. They didn't think about it, but this hatred grew in them. There were only two creatures that remained faithful to him, the black tom-cat and the goat, Marfa. They were glad when he returned. They came to his room daily, and when he went out they followed him.

The peasants thought:

“What Christian is good to animals? He is no Christian.”

And a hidden rage was mixed with their hatred.

In the evening, when they all came to Raimondi's house, he was accustomed to go out and the animals ran with him. Then the people struck out at them and kicked them with their heavy boots behind his back. One afternoon he had been rowing on the lake; when he came home he found

the tom-cat lying before his door. It was covered with blood, its nose severed by a mighty blow from a knife. It had been stabbed all over and four ribs were broken. The animal had dragged itself up to his door, and died as he carried it into the room. A fiery rage seized him and he raced down the stairs. The people stood before the house, the tailor had grouped them in a wide semi-circle, as he did every evening.

Frank Braun stepped up to them.

“Which of you killed the tom-cat?”

No one answered; those in the front row gazed on the ground in dumb cowardice. But from the back rows a thin, hateful titter sounded. And Girolamo Scuro, who stood on one side, drew up his face in broad laughter.

The German went up to him:

“Was it you?” he hissed at him.

The huge fellow retreated a step.

“No,” he said hesitatingly, “I know nothing about it.”

But he continued to grin and his red goiter was puffed up like a gobbler’s wattle.

Frank Braun raised his hand.

“Take that,” he cried, “and give it to the scoundrel who killed the cat!”

He aimed well and his fist came down with full force on the fellow’s nose, so that the blood spurted out at once. The man howled with pain and threw himself upon him; but Frank Braun gave him a mighty blow in the stomach so that the other collapsed and writhed, and a third blow on his head felled him to the earth. He grasped another of the men who jumped at him by the right hand, twisted his arm about quickly and threw him to the ground.

Then he whistled to the goat. It leaped out of the stable and ran after him. He pushed the people roughly aside to the right and to the left; they retreated and formed a lane for him; no one dared to touch him. In that manner he strode through the crowd with the animal. He climbed into the olive groves, his breast heaving.

“That did me good,” he murmured, “that did me a lot of good.”

He sat down on the grass and took sugar out of his pocket.

“There, eat, Marfa,” he said. “Don’t be afraid, they won’t hurt you. You yield milk—you’re an investment. They would have to pay Raimondi if they killed you. But Fritzi, you see, was not an investment. He was only a tom-cat; he only ate and gave no return: so he was worth nothing. That is why those pious people went at him—for that reason!”

He trembled with rage. Oh, he intended to tame them, these mountain cattle; they would jump and kiss his whip. His blood cried out and wildly demanded the power of a master over this lower race. But then a quiet melancholy came over him. To what end? To what end? What satisfaction was it to thrust his riding-whip into their faces? And how cheap was this pride in the thought that he was a being of a higher type. He stroked the white goat. He plucked small green leaves for her and led her to the blackberry bushes; he ate the berries, and she ate the tender shoots.

“If I were a faun,” he said, “if I had two horns and hairy goat’s legs and a long beard like you—I’d like to have seven goat maidens and live among them and play the flute. Sometimes, in the evening, I’d make my way to the lake where the girls wash the linen—ah, you needn’t bleat, old Marfa! What is there to a human girl? Can she jump and climb over the steepest cliffs? Pshaw, one hunts them and catches them, and takes them and lets them run again.”

From the barn came discordant sounds.

“Do you hear them, Marfa? They sing and pray. And they do not even know what laughter is. But we know it well; we fauns and goats and the great Pan in his bushes.”

He returned to the inn. Angelo stood at the stable door; the goat ran up to him, reared, and laid her hoofs on his shoulder. The fellow grinned in an almost embarrassed way; with his clumsy paw he scratched her neck.

“You were out walking again with the goat, sir?” he asked.

A strange quiver lay in his question, like a gleam of quiet knowledge and understanding. Frank Braun looked at him astonished.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

Angelo stammered, turned red as a poppy and grinned in his broad stupid way. Then he took the goat, went into the stable and disappeared in the darkness. Frank Braun looked after him. Slowly he understood.

“You are also a faun!” he smiled, “—poor fellow—and you must serve among Christian people!”

He went to his room; he saw at once that someone had been there. His table was in disorder, the books disarranged, the papers shoved aside as if someone had been looking for something. He opened the drawer: his revolver was gone. So that’s what they were afraid of? His nostrils expanded; his upper lip drew itself in ironically. As if he needed a pistol for these cattle! He went down and ate. Then he hurried to the American’s hall. He went softly and stood behind one of the diagonal beams that supported the wall. Again Pietro Nosclere had made certain changes.

Pasteboard signs with pious sayings had now been fastened on all the walls and beams. Long nails had been driven along the whole rear wall, at about human height, from which the scourges: whips, rods, and cudgels hung. There were several dozens. One saw that the prophet had many disciples. Beneath these, a stage about a foot in height had been built of boards, from this one could now to some extent look down on the audience. And there, under the image of Christ, stood Teresa’s chair; she reclined on it with her eyes closed and with a little crucifix, as always, in her hand. At her feet crouched Gino, to the right sat the prophet. At her left stood old, weather-beaten Ulpo.

“She looks like an extinguished light,” Frank Braun thought.

Near Ulpo stood the tailor Ronchi. He stood in front of the band, which occupied the entire side of the stage. Next to the American sat Girolamo Scuro. The right side was occupied by more than a dozen young fellows, each of whom held a large candle in his hand; before them stood the deformed Ratti, who beat time to their singing with his saber. When the song was ended, Matilda Venier stepped on the stage and confessed her soul. She was followed by Carimelina Gaspari who, with tears, accused herself of having formerly spoken evil of the saint.

He thought:

“If only Teresa doesn’t confess her soul.”

But she did not move and did not even open her closed eyelids. Now Venier’s wife drove her daughter forward. Little Fiammetta did not hesitate, sprang swiftly up the steps, bowed her head, closed her eyes, folded her hands and prayed aloud. Then she began, stuttering a little at first but soon

becoming fluent, bubbling out impudently and hastily what she had been taught to say. Her guilt was great, she said, because she was not her father's child, but had been conceived by her mother in iniquity. And she had been begotten by the border guard, Herr Aloys Drenker, who was a drinker and a sinner and a son of Satan.

"Now, however, I am saved," she closed, "and I thank the Lamb that my mother and I are on the way to Heaven. And it is our desire to fight against the devil until we die. But my father is not yet wholly saved and I beg you, my dear fellow fighters, to pray for him, that he may come to Jesus and be saved for the sake of the cross. Amen!"

Frank Braun spat out; a bitter taste lay on his tongue.

"The walls should cave in from sheer disgust," he murmured.

He looked sharply at Teresa but not a muscle in her face quivered. Did she know nothing of all that went on around her? A young fellow confessed his soul; then Ratti, and Maria Grazia, Ulpo's daughter.

Frank Braun thought:

"Is no one going to get up and confess that he killed the tom-cat?"

But he reflected that they were Christians and that that was not a sin. Teresa moved her hand and spoke thoughtfully. The American and old Ulpo stretched their heads to listen; Scuro and Ronchi approached too. They nodded; then the tailor went forward and said they were to sing the fasting song in closing. So they were through for this evening? Frank Braun stepped out of the hall into the night air.

But he waited; he wanted to see Teresa and talk to her—in spite of the people. They sang all seven stanzas and the refrain from each stanza five times over. He strode up and down indifferently. Finally they finished and came crowding out the door. At last Teresa came. Her feet were bare; with her left hand she leaned lightly on the boy's shoulder. But she turned to the right, straight toward the house of the prophet. Around her were the women—Celestina, the wife of Pietro, then Carmelina, Matilda Venier and Maria Grazia; several men, too, entered the house.

Pietro Nosclere followed slowly, talking to his servant. Frank Braun approached them swiftly and barred the door before they entered. He shoved the farmhand aside with his elbow; then he seized the American by the arm.

“I want to speak with you, Pietro,” he said quietly. “See that you get out of my way, Scuro.” The man hesitated. Then Frank Braun turned to him.

“Must I beat you again? Go!”

Growling, the gigantic fellow stepped into the house. The prophet looked aside shyly.

“What do you want with me?” he asked. “Why did you come back?”

Frank Braun answered:

“That doesn’t concern you. I shall question you and you will answer me. Do you hear?”

“Yes,” said the prophet, grinding his teeth.

“Then tell me this: does Teresa confess her soul?”

The American shook his head:

“No,” he answered. “Why should a saint confess her soul?”

“Does she scourge herself?” Frank Braun asked further.

Mr. Peter was silent.

“Answer me!” he demanded.

“Why don’t you come to our meetings?” said Pietro. “You are free to; anyone may come and see what she does.”

Frank Braun seized him by the coat.

“No subterfuges! Does she use the scourge?”

“Yes,” Pietro admitted.

Frank Braun breathed quickly; his heart seemed to be beating in his mouth.

“She uses the scourge,” he repeated slowly. “Whom does she strike?”

The American tried to get away.

“Sir,” he cried impatiently, “she uses the scourge of the Lord against all her brothers and sisters! She strikes the sinful flesh and pours the blood for Him who died on the cross.”

A red mist seemed to settle over Frank Braun’s eyes. But he did not let the American go; he held him, no matter how he writhed.

“And you people,” he asked, “do you strike her too?”

Mr. Peter shook his head vehemently.

“We! Would we strike the saint?”

He released him; he could have embraced him for these words. But his distrust vanished only for a moment, and returned again at once with double intensity.

He asked quickly:

“What is she doing in your house now?”

“I don’t know,” Pietro stammered.

Then Frank Braun held his fist under the man’s eyes.

“Speak, you dog!” he hissed. “Do you want me to crush your skull?”

The prophet trembled in pitiable fear.

“Sir, I don’t know, I really don’t know. It is the first time that she has come to my house. She said to me suddenly that God the Lord was in her, and that she had to withdraw immediately from all men. Then I asked her whether perhaps she would come to my house. And she nodded. That is what happened.”

He realized that Pietro was speaking the truth; so he released him.

“I will enter with you,” he said.

The American looked at him with extreme malevolence, but dared not argue. Together they entered the house. At the farther end of the hall he saw Teresa sitting on the bench by the stove; only the boy was close beside her. All the others kept at a distance from her; it seemed that the saint wished it so. There were probably ten people in the room; they regarded him with curiosity and suspicion when he entered, but no one said a word. It had been his intention to approach her and address her at once; but he saw that her eyes were fixed on nothingness, that her spirit was removed from all that went on around her.

So he sat down on a chair close by the window, leaned his elbows on his knees, supported his head in his hands and looked over at her. No one spoke. They all waited for something that was to happen. Teresa held the crucifix firmly in her hands, but her eyes looked beyond it, far away. Then a smile of utter blessedness played around her lips; slowly she arose and the crucifix slipped from her fingers. It was as if she saw the Lord. She knelt

down, arose again, her hands were folded and upraised and finally she assumed the position of a priest pronouncing the Dominus Vobiscum.

Finally she sank upon her knees again and remained that way for a long time. Frank Braun did not take his eyes from her, following her smallest gestures. There was no doubt that Teresa was in an intensely visionary state. He pulled up his thoughts as he would a noble horse, grasped the snaffle bit and rode into the land of her visions. And he understood her well. She lay in the olive garden and prayed with the Savior. Her face mirrored all the temptations that had oppressed the Son of God in His human character, and all His recoiling from suffering and death. And she prayed fervently and wrung herself free from human fears through the power of prayer.

Kneeling, she saw and experienced all the pains and torments from the capture at Gethsemane to the crucifixion. She arose from her knees and her body fell backwards. She now lay on her back, spread out her arms and stretched her naked feet forward. She crossed one foot over the other as if she herself were the Lamb upon the slaughtering block of the cross. But then she raised herself up again, and kneeling, with tears in her eyes, looked upward—even as the Mother of God looked upward in pain upon Her Son. And deep in her breast she felt the sufferings of Him who hung on the cross. A horrible fear of death seized her; the power of her limbs was wholly broken. Her face faded to an intense pallor; one color of life after another died away.

But the sacred wounds upon her hands and feet grew ever more vivid. Her nails became blue; her lips hung flaccid and dry around her open mouth. Her braids were loosened; cold sweat dripped from her forehead and from her hollow cheeks and moistened her locks. Bitter tears broke from her rigid eyes and fell down in great drops. But now there gleamed other red drops on her forehead and mixed with her tears; a bloody diadem surrounded her head; the stigmata of the Redeemer's crown of thorns. A twitching started from the corners of her open mouth, flashed down like the lightning of a near storm and shook her body with the frosts of death.

A heavy breathing wrung itself from the heaving breast; between, there came sighs and moans. All the mystic wounds opened like springs; her face was covered with blood, her white garment was stained red with the blood from the wound in her side, and long streams of blood flowed from her

hands and feet. A sobbing as if of approaching death seized her, ever more violent convulsions shook her body, which offered less and less resistance. The moaning and sighing turned into a death rattle, her eyes seemed to burst from their sockets and her poor body, desperate and worn out, struggled with death attacking everywhere. The excess of all her agony streamed outward from within with increasing force and contorted her face until it was unrecognizable.

Then she collapsed. Her arms fell limp and her jaw dropped wide. Her tongue emerged from the pallid lips, dark blue and swollen to an ungainly size in her convulsions. Her lids were set and the last gleam fled from her eyes amidst heavy tears. In short pauses a violent inward sobbing was heard; then finally she sank back, totally exhausted by these torments. The last signs of the convulsion disappeared from her face and limbs; she lay as rigid as a dead body. They all looked dumbly at her lifeless form; none stirred from his place. The dumb boy, huddled up, crouched under her chair was rigid with fear, scarcely capable of breathing.

An epileptic twitching flew over the prophet's face and thin saliva trickled from the corners of his mouth. Brief cramps seemed to thrust his body to and fro; his arms flew about in harsh ungainliness.

"She is dead," he whispered. "The saint is dead."

He was about to hurry to her. With one leap Frank Braun was at his side, encircled his wrist firmly and pushed him with a powerful jerk back on the bench.

"Don't move!" he cried out to him. "Don't move!"

Pietro Nosclere was badly frightened. His teeth rattled and his body trembled. But the threatening attack was extinguished; he remained quietly sitting on his bench. After a few minutes Teresa raised her head again, and knelt down in new contemplation. Her face seemed quiet, every expression of torment had vanished; her eyes opened. She turned about in a semicircle, following something with her glances that moved around her. Then she arose, stood immovably upright, and her glances were turned toward the ceiling. The pupils of her eyes turned upward more and more and finally disappeared entirely under the lids. At the same time she slowly raised the outstretched palms of her hands. Frank Braun regarded her intently.

“The vision has gone,” he whispered. “She is falling into the state of ecstasy.”

An untroubled joy beamed from the girl’s face, as if in her jubilation she would embrace the whole world and send her rapture forth to it in kisses; thus she stretched out her arms and hands and closed them tightly and vigorously as if she would never again let go of that which she held. Her face beamed in a fervent rapture, a fullness of ecstatic joy, her breast heaved in a blessed shudder, as of an embrace. And she raised herself to her feet and stood high on the tips of her toes which scarcely seemed to touch the ground. She seemed to float, everything in her bore her, by an upward impulse, into the very air.

And very softly her lips sang:

“Let us fly away, let us fly away to eternal joy!”

There was no longer anything human about her. Frank Braun’s eyes opened wide. He devoured her sweet form; He drew it in with every pore. The drops of blood gleamed like pomegranate blossoms upon her white forehead, her black tresses fell far down over her naked shoulders; her white garment, flecked here and there with blood, was as billowy as a white cloud upon which the departing sun throws the last greetings of its heart’s blood.

“Oh, if I were only a painter!” he murmured.

Suddenly, without transition, she fell to the floor. She lay stretched out on her back, her eyes closed at once. It was as if she had fallen from an infinite height. Still she continued to stretch out her arms, clutching at the air with her hands as if seeking some support. Then her body rose, curved in a violent convulsion like a bow and rested only on her feet and on the back of her head. The next moment she threw herself around; now clonic convulsions tugged at her poor limbs. She started up, no longer touching the floor, beat wildly around her with her arms and legs and cried out in a terrible paroxysm. Finally she sprang to her knees, uttered a fearful cry and pulled out great handfuls of her hair.

Ghastly fear, wild despair cried out from her features and she shrieked:

“Oh, the abyss! The abyss!”

She crouched down, and crept into a corner on all fours, like a wild animal hunted to its death. There she lay motionless through long minutes.

Her breathing became quieter and her features calmer. The dumb boy crept softly up to her. He knelt before her and seized the edge of her garment with his two small hands. And now life returned to her body. The eyes did not open, but she thrust her head forward and seemed to see the boy through her closed lids.

Her cheeks flushed red, her mouth half opened and a desirous smile lay on her face. She raised her arms a little toward the boy; it was as if she saw the lovely body of an angel before her. Her breasts swelled and a gentle tremor ran through her body. Then she leaned back, lying flat, with her head supported against the wall. And gently, scarcely noticeably, she raised her body and, under the linen that hid them, drew her legs apart. Her mouth opened and closed as in kisses, a deep sigh of ardent happiness issued from between her white teeth.

Frank Braun looked at her; saw these limbs that trembled and melted in supreme rapture, and these lips that drank all passionate blessedness.

“Incubus, incubus!” he whispered.

To be sure, he had often seen her face in such moments. And yet—it was different now, with an image of such unheard of delight as no earthly embrace could give. And he thought of Bernini’s statue in Santa Maria della Vittoria at Rome, of that white stone which represents the apotheosis of St. Teresa.

Yes, that is how the girl looked, like the holy lady of Avila in the enjoyment of an angelic embrace. To be sure, the angel of the Spanish saint was a beautiful page, a charming cherub of fourteen, made to be the delight of great ladies. The girl of Scodra had only this poor, emaciated, dumb boy; but in her eyes he had become a lovely youth. Her arms hung limp at her sides, and she drew her knees upward a little.

And from the wounds of her feet to those upon her forehead her body was only a vessel which filled itself with the sweet pains of heavenly love.

“Incubus, incubus!” he repeated.

Gradually through the silent minutes this great ecstasy receded from her features. Frank Braun stepped up close to her. Heavily her eyes opened; they now stared upward again, fixed on the ceiling, showing only the whites. But this time it was a fluttering, a striving upward, internal only and

scarcely to be noticed without. Her hands were raised hardly an inch. She lay motionless, stiff and rigid.

But Frank Braun saw clearly that no convulsion held her now and that her condition was not a cataleptic one.

“Now she is with God,” he whispered.

He supported his head in his hands and his eyes caressed the ecstatic girl.

He thought:



“Now you are a statue by the stream of time and see with eternal eyes the secret of creation. Now you are no longer human, no longer Teresa, and a human personality, but one who is nameless and impersonal. Your eyes are dead but your spirit is all embracing, like the Nothing and the All—now you float in emptiness and dwell with the Mothers. You have returned into eternity and your consciousness has grasped itself in its own real character which no longer knows any form, and holds within itself past, future and present.

This being is a Nothingness which embraces everything; it is the motion of the world which proceeds immediately out of itself in order to grasp the inmost character of its own being in eternal purity. If your soul was once a full blown rose, it has now become a bud. Everything melts; everything dissolves and returns to the primeval beginning. Now you are no longer tormented by horrible visions of crucified gods; now you are far from them and from all that has life. And you have gained, O happy one, the feeling of the infinite!”

He sighed deeply.

“How I envy you, poor girl! Your soul stands before its origin, naked and nameless, without any peculiar being. You have lifted yourself beyond time and no longer know anything of a yesterday or tomorrow, but only of an eternal present. For even the smallest part of all time, the Now, still has something of the temporal character—but you are above time and the Now. And you are above space and have simultaneous knowledge of all things in all the farthest worlds.

We men think in time, but you have vision of everything in an eternal moment. Time and space are the borders which divide us from God; these you have crossed and your soul gains its knowledge beyond space and time. Formless itself, your soul plunges into the formless deity. For God—is you, thrice happy one, knowing nothing other than your own experience. You are in God—and so you are God.

Do you not feel, beloved, how the wings of your soul are growing? A light surrounds you and a lovely warmth which melts all hardness and fixity and that dreadful heaviness which makes us cling to the crust of the soiled earth. Everything melts into a boundless light and sinks itself into you—and you are the light and the all.”

He took his handkerchief and covered her face.

“It is not well for you to be seen, O happy one,” he whispered. “It is as if one gazed into the sun and yet knew that one might never grasp it. Therefore one must not desire it; one might become blind, if one were to see God.

The people that believe in God know nothing about him. To some he is a concept, to some, a cause, something comfortable that is not really required in their view of the world. He is an invisible motor that makes all the wheels turn.

To others he is a great name like Alexander or Caesar or Napoleon. He is a hero like them—with the difference that he is still alive today. He and his power must be reckoned with; accounts must be settled, as with the tax collector and the police.

—The Saints alone are the only ones that know God. They don’t believe what they hear from other people. They see with their own eyes and touch with their own hands. Out of their personal experience they know God, like a flower, like a bottle of wine, like others experience life—that is how they experience God.

Slowly he went up and down in the room. He approached Pietro and put a hand on his shoulder.

“I am thirsty,” he said. “Give me a drink of water.”

The American got up and spoke to his wife; she went out and remained away for a while.

Frank Braun grew impatient:

“Go see what your wife is doing! Is it so hard to get a mouthful of water in this house?”

Pietro went himself and at last brought in the water. He took the glass and raised it to his lips, then, sudden suspicion seized him and he lowered it again.

“You drink first,” he said.

“Why?” the prophet asked. “I am not thirsty.”

“Drink!” he commanded.

He saw how Pietro took a deep draught.

“I was mistaken,” he thought. “How did I come to think of that?”

He drained the glass hastily. Teresa had not yet moved. Gino had crept up close to her and was chaffing her ice cold feet. The men and women, grown calmer through the quietness of the saint, stood or sat in groups and whispered softly. Celestina Nosclere went around and distributed wooden cups filled with milk.

“Will you not let us partake of the Blood of the Lamb?” asked the prophet’s servant.

But Pietro shook his head. Then the girl stirred. The kerchief fell from her face and she looked around in astonishment.

“Am I here?” she asked softly.

They all crowded up to her.

Venier said, “Yes, sister, you are with us now—but where were you?”

Teresa did not answer. They lifted her and placed her on the bench. Carmelina Gaspari fetched large pillows and shoved them behind her back. She seemed weak and tired, but her eyes had a clear and free look. She made signs to the boy with her fingers; he jumped up quickly and brought her a cup of milk from the table. She took it and thanked him but scarcely moistened her lips.

Venier was urgent.

“Holy Sister, will you not tell us what you have seen?”

Teresa caressed the boy’s tousled hair.

“No, no,” she murmured. “One cannot EXPRESS it. One cannot speak of it in human words.”

Her eyes fell upon Frank Braun.

“Are you here?” she said.

“Come here to me.”

She spoke quietly and gently, but there was a firm sound in that soft voice which did not command and yet took obedience as a matter of course. He felt that distinctly; therefore he did not answer and did not move from the spot.

Then she said quietly, “Bring him here to me. The people crowded up. He looked at them in astonishment—they seemed transformed in a moment. He saw their faces, they looked firm and determined and all timidity had gone. Girolamo Scuro stepped in front of him with outstretched arms.

“You are to go to her!” he said.

And Ratti said, “Yes, sir, you are to go to her.”

This little cobbler who was always about to collapse before him out of sheer terror and respect! Now he stood there and opened his eyes wide and clenched his hands, instantly ready to throw himself upon him and to set his teeth in him. Frank Braun remained standing, confused and undecided—what had happened? Only a few hours ago he strode among these cowardly peasants, he alone among hundreds of them. With his fist he had beaten his way through and there was no one who dared even open his lips. Now they stood there, threatening and strong—and the weakest among them would attack him without hesitation.

He turned around and looked at Teresa. Her eyes were cast down; her hands gently caressed the boy’s head. She did not even look up; all quietude and gracious gentleness lay on the girl. And yet it was from her that this spirit of resistance proceeded—that was plain. The folk of Val di Scodra had been a great beast without brain, creeping cowardly and timidly, fleeing at his very glance.

But now it had a will. TERISA’s will. Now it felt itself strong, opened its maw and stepped into his path, and did not draw back. The master’s voice was lost in the wind now that another master commanded. They stood close around him like a well-built wall. He saw Ronchi turn aside and he heard the key turn with a hoarse grinding sound. Now he was imprisoned. The force of his will was blown away and he could throw it away like an old glove.

Nothing was left that made him a superior of these peasants, now it was a question of wild, physical combat. He counted them quickly. Ratti, Ronchi, old Ulpo and the prophet—but the latter was not worth counting. But there was the gigantic Girolamo Scuro who could now use his slave’s fists unhindered. And the vigorous young Ulpo and Venier and three other peasants. And there were the women. These women—they would cling to him with their nails and teeth. There was

no doubt but that he would be beaten. And even if his wounded pride and his angry contempt should make his muscles hard as steel, and even if agility and practice should easily make him master over each individual—nevertheless they would hold him and triumph over him. And in the end even his greatest victory would end in flight. He bit his lips and approached Teresa quietly.

She asked him, “Were you here the whole time?”

He nodded silently.

“What has happened?” she asked further.

The questions affronted him; this seemed to him like a judicial examination. Nevertheless he answered:

“You were in a state of ecstasy.”

She was silent for a while.

Slowly she said, “Yes . . . I have seen God.”

He waited, then, as she hesitated, he cried brusquely, “What do you want of me?—I wish to go; do you hear me?—you can stay here alone with your prophet!”

Then she jumped up vehemently, in one bound. She stood close before him; her hot breath touched his face, her eyes looked sharply into his.

“Do you forget who led me to him?”

He was not silent but accepted the challenge which she offered.

“It was I!” he cried aloud. “I!”

He looked to one side, seized the American, who stood next to him, by the arm and pulled him forward.

“It was I!” he repeated sharply. “It was I who made Pietro Nosclere a prophet and you a saint! I played with you as with puppets; you are dancing according to my wires! You are my creatures: lumps of clay into which I breathed my breath!”

He threw back his head and his fists were clenched. Now, he felt, he had strength, now no one would be able to hold him back. Now he was free. Teresa looked at him as if she understood his thought,

“You want to leave?” she asked quietly.

He answered:

“It doesn’t concern you whether I go or stay. But since you ask I’ll tell you; day after tomorrow at two o’clock in the afternoon I shall leave by the stage.”

She smiled quietly.

“The stage will leave day after tomorrow at two o’clock. But you will not leave!”

She turned to the others and raised her voice.

“Do you hear? He is not to leave by the stage! Tell all the people in the village that he is not to leave.”

He seized her hand and shook it.

“What?” he cried. “I am not to leave? I assure you that I will!”

She withdrew her hand.

“Let go,” she said quietly. “You hurt me.”

But then she repeated:

“You will not go. You belong to me.”

He laughed in her face.

“Really?—to you? Look, I always assumed the contrary.”

She looked at him with quiet assurance.

“Be still,” she said. “Do you want to tell that I was your mistress? But to whom? To me. I know it. Or to the others?—everyone in the whole village knows it. Yes, I have lain in your arms and do not deny it. Nor do I deny what is more: that it was you who showed me the path that leads to God. Do you believe Pietro would deny it?—he as little as myself.”

She turned to the latter with her smile of assurance.

“Tell him yourself, brother.”

The American hesitated a moment. Then he spoke aloud.

“Yes, he led me upon the path. He told me that the Lord had blessed me with His grace and that the spirit of the prophet Elijah was alive in me. He taught me what power God had placed in the blows of

the scourge, and how, in my hand, the wine would be transformed into the Blood of the Lamb.”

“Do you hear it?” said Teresa. “And so I also will tell what you did. It was you who took me to the prophet’s hall, you alone. You know that I didn’t want to go and only obeyed out of my love for you. And it was you who spoke to me of all the things that I did not know. You told me of the lives of the saints who bore the wounds of our Lord and saw His face—it was you alone. And if the high gate of all grace has opened in Val di Scodra—it was you who brought us the key.”

Her voice rose and sounded bright and clear in great full tones.

“We know well that it was the Lord who sent you. But we also know that you alone do not believe in His power. You were His tool and thought you were master. Because you unlocked the gate to the realm of all splendors you thought that it was your kingdom. But now all enter through that lofty gate—and you alone must remain outside.”

Her words sounded prophetic, she raised her arms high and very gently rocked her head to and fro.

“Difficult is the way that leads upward, full of thorns and jagged shards. The thorns tear our naked feet and blood flows as from a sparkling spring. But I go that way, and above, a bright light is radiant: there the Heavenly Bridegroom will embrace the bride. There my sight aspires and does not see the snake that creeps amid the stones. It will sting me, it will sting me, but my feet stride farther upward—upward!”

Her eyes glowed and her hand touched his temples.

“You are that snake!” she cried. “You will sting me!—But then, when the last pain is conquered, when the flesh is overcome and the blessed soul rejoices in the kiss of the Bridegroom, then you will stand below and look up and the worm of suffering will devour you. Eternally you will cling to the lowliness of the earth’s soil; restlessly you will wander through all lands, unquiet, joyless without end.”

She breathed deeply and let herself fall heavily back on the bench. She closed her eyes and was silent for a little space. Then her lips moved again, softly, almost whispering. Frank Braun had to bow his head to understand what she said.

“I see you fleeing with eternal death at your back, over hills and lakes, through long valleys and broad plains. I see you sitting in a spacious square and the sun streams from the white marble. All around tall palaces arise, but your eyes are cast down. And someone calls your name—but you hear my voice. And clouds cover the sun—”

Her whisper died and her lips still moved a little without sound. He took her hands.

“Tell on, Teresa; tell me what you see then.”

She twitched and raised herself up as if she were awakening from sleep.

“I do not know,” she said softly, “I do not know.”

Then she arose. “Oh, I am tired. Take me home.”

Carmelina Gaspari approached softly and supported her. Teresa laid her right arm heavily over the other’s shoulder and moved forward.

“Good night, sisters!” she cried. “Good night brothers! Pray for me.”

Gino proceeded, all the others followed, accompanying her home. Slowly Frank Braun walked behind. He went down to the shore, untied the boat, and rowed out. He used the oars with all his strength, seeking an outlet for his hot excitement in this physical exertion. But he did not succeed; he returned after an hour and his pulses throbbed no less. The house was surrounded on all sides. He saw Scuro standing under his window. Young Ulpo and his friend Pasquale Pederzoli sat on the steps before the door. Frank Braun addressed them:

“You are watching me? Wouldn’t you rather go to sleep?”

Ulpo answered, “The saint has commanded us. We can sleep later. In three hours we will be relieved.”

He stood up and made way for him to reach the door.

“So you’re willing to let me go in?” Frank Braun asked. “But not out of the house, again, I suppose?”

“Oh, yes, sir,” answered the fellow, “you may go out. You may go wherever you please, in the village and in the gardens. You may also go out on the lake. But twelve will always follow you and not let you leave. Ratti decided it so.”

Frank Braun laughed. Ratti, the night watchman! So Ratti was the commander-in-chief, and he himself the prisoner of the little hunchbacked cobbler!

“Is Ratti here?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” said Ulpo. “He’s lying on a bench in the guest room. Shall I call him?”

The German stepped into the house and went into the guest room. Ratti was not asleep; he sat by the lamp, his rosary in his hands. Frank Braun approached him and drew a banknote from his pocket.

“Here are a thousand crowns!” he said. “Do you want them? Let me leave tonight and you will get the money.”

The little cobbler turned around.

“You are the tempter!” he said. “You are the Antichrist!”

“Very well,” said Frank Braun. “Just as I expected—Good night, Ratti!”

He went to his room whistling. His offer had not been serious; he had not for a moment expected the other to accept it. Only one will ruled in Val di Scodra—and that was Teresa’s will. He undressed slowly. How changed everything was; how inside-out everything had turned! He had been the center around which everything circled; he had stood still and been the sun around which the world of Val di Scodra fervently turned.

And Teresa had been but a mote carried along in the wild whirl around him. But now the dead star had its own life and light; he was the cold moon, long dead, held and bound in the strict fetters of that sun’s majesty. Was it not his fire which nourished her? Was it not his good light which she had stolen? He shook his head. Oh, no, it was her own innermost life and light. He had only ignited and awakened it. He himself had always been dead, cold and rigid, an unsightly mass of fog which puffed itself up and flew toward the sun.

She was the true and strong sun. To be sure, he had good eyes; she did not blind him as she did all the others. He could look into the depths of her heart, and her beams did not singe him but broke before his glance. What was all the fuss about? Her stigmata did not worry him; they were no common event, to be sure, but nothing extraordinary. It gave him little trouble to explain them. Then there was her clairvoyance. She had spoken

strange words to him, which pointed to something in the near or distant future. But he could well discard those for the present.

Only if a light really were to be kindled from her stammering, only then did he need to reckon with it, only then seek and dig for reasons and connections. Until then they were only words, the confused words of one in a state of hallucination, worthless chaff.

Also her sacred vision was something petty and explicable enough; his mind didn't need to delay over things which could seem supernatural only to poor fools. And the apotheosis? The incubus? The angel who drew her to the couch on which Mary had lain? Pshaw, it was something great only for the artist that lived in his eye, but something very inconsiderable for the scholar in his brain. So there remained just one thing—the state of ecstasy.

There was no doubt that Teresa Raimondi had achieved the state of ecstasy on this night. With this she left Louise Lateau, Marguerite Alacoque, Maria of Mörl and the ecstatic maiden of the Tyrol far behind her. All that these experienced and that good people called ecstasy, was nothing but simple religious vision. They saw what everybody sees in devotional pictures, what every child hears from its priest: but they never saw God. The ecstasies of St. Teresa were, to be sure, purer and more authentic, but even with them was frequently blended the disturbing element of mere Christian vision. Perhaps there was just one among all the women—Sister Katrei—But how was it now? Where should he find a breach through which to penetrate into this highest temple and hurl the insolent torch of destruction?

He took another image. This ecstasy was Ophir, Solomon's land of Gold. Or the mysterious copper city of which the Senussi tell, or Atlantis, which the sea swallowed, or Eldorado, or the land of Bimini which the Conquistadores sought. That land must lie somewhere—and so there must be a way that leads to it. He weighed possibilities. The psychic was not to be separated from the facts of physiology, and if the theory of descent held good for the properties of the body, it must hold good for those of the soul. If through the development of billions of years the protoplasm had become man, if bones and muscles, blood and nerves were formed, transformed and changed, the form of consciousness must also have altered its character. But just here lies the kernel of all ecstasy—namely, that, in persons capable of it, consciousness undergoes a change.

So was it not possible to find this different type of consciousness somewhere among the rungs of the long developed mental ladder?

Then he thought of Faust and softly declaimed:

“Two souls, alas! are lodg’d within my breast, Which struggled there for undivided reign; One to the world, with obstinate desire, and closely clinging organs, still adheres above the mist; the other aspires, with sacred vehemence, to purer spheres. There it was! Not two souls that are separate to be sure: but one soul which turns into another; A soul which suffers nostalgia for the degradation of its ancestors, which yearns to get out of the free air and into the dull caverns of its lowly forbearers.

Goethe might call them lofty in his image all he pleased: yet it was the same wise instinct which led him later to “The Mothers!” In this sense the soul of man was merely the consciousness of the antithesis between the I and the external world. No one had undertaken to question that since Descartes. The lowest type of animal, however, had neither brain nor nervous system; a stimulus on its surface merely released an immediate effect; the beginning of consciousness might have lain at some point where special parts of the body developed merely in order to transmit the stimulus to other parts which responded to its reaction. There was not even the smallest brain at this point, but probably the first nerves which immediately transmitted the stimulus without any gathering point. The animal neither saw nor felt the food particles swimming in the water, only purely external chemical or mechanical stimuli caused the effect without any perception or willing. Hence it was impossible that such an animal should have a consciousness like ours and grasp the antithesis between the I and the external world: its consciousness must necessarily have been a feeling of the Oneness of itself and the World. As far as this animal was concerned there were no boundaries between the two.

But this was the very conception of all ecstasy! It obliterated all boundaries and merged man with the All and the All with man. Braun recognized this, and sought for some physiological element that might point the way to this conclusion. What elements were there in this ecstasy that were other than a normal condition and that might offer him some grip? Few enough, to be sure,—and yet these might be enough.

In the first place, there was that feeling of floating and lying. Everybody had experienced this in dreams—and were not dreams allied to

ecstasy? A hundred reports told of men who flew through the air. Gautama Buddha and Maha Sumata floated; Plato's pupil, Iamblichus, lifted himself ten yards above the ground; the history of Christian ecstasies was full of the accounts of pious persons whose bodies arose freely like the body of Teresa. Here, as always, it was Christian mysticism that went deepest, and produced results far greater and more wonderful than all the Indian and Egyptian saints.

St. Christina of St. Proud flew far over towns and villages unto Heaven, and the Acta are full of the depositions of citizens and peasants who saw the blessed flier float through the air. What did it matter whether the accounts concerning St. Christina, whose flight Diepenbeck painted, and the accounts of all other Christian and heathen flying were objectively true or not? Subjectively they were certainly true.

Just as everyone could say, "I flew in a dream,"

So the saints could say with all truthfulness:

"I flew in ecstasy."

And it was beyond all doubt that these pious persons lost the sensation of weight in their consciousness. Another sensation took its place—that of weightlessness—the consciousness of equilibrium. No being that lived in the air could have this; it could only arise when the specific gravity of a body was approximately the same as that of the surrounding element. The fishes had it—our lowest ancestors. And as in the case of a swimmer, his lungs again functioned like the airbladder from which they originally developed, so in the central organ of our nervous system there may be present extremely ancient vestigial remnants which, in the condition of ecstasy, reawaken the long lost sensation of equilibrium.

The other element was the light. All persons in a state of ecstasy beheld it, and to all it was the greatest happiness and the highest bliss. But they perceived it not with the eye; they felt it also with closed lids and in the dark: it was an inner light, which they did not see but felt. Was this not the same thing that our ancestors did billions of years ago?—those animals whose eyes neither saw nor differentiated objects but only served as light perceiving organs, which were assigned to central parts and received this phenomenon of light as a mere stimulus?

How many things did the human body contain which have died away slowly, but live on uselessly through thousands of years, vestiges of an ancient time! Organs which once fulfilled some function and which now, apparently meaningless, seem to exist only to give rise to some diseased condition. But if these, like the appendix, had a pathologically harmful effect upon the total organism—was it not possible that in other respects, and under other circumstances, they might exert an influence too? Perhaps the pineal gland was the remnant of some old organ of sense—now the chain was finished. He lacked only one link: to explain the possibility that the human consciousness could change for moments, that it could revert to earlier developmental stages. He did not have to seek long in this direction, for every day offered him many examples. Did not lust, rage or terror, did they not show again and again the vestiges of primitive, animal, instinctive actions together with the type of consciousness that accompanied them? The connection here was so close between the physical process and the state of consciousness that the two could not be separated and the passion in question arose out of the closest blending of the two.

If one were to subtract its physical symptoms from terror, if one were to let the pulse beat quietly, the glance be firm, the motion swift and certain, the color normal, speech vigorous and thought clear—why, what would be left of terror? And so in the case of a person dying of thirst or of hunger, the contemporary form of consciousness tends to disappear, and in its place comes some ancestral form which we call instinct. But all these effects are related to ecstasy. Plotinus said that even animals had visions and yearned after an eternal contemplation during the procreative act—Goethe would have called this the feeling of “lofty ancestors.”

And yet it remained that of lower ancestors—a backward, not a forward impulse! But in the case of all saints, ecstasy was the final conclusion of the highest rapture. Hunger—thirst—castigation—these were always the means toward this great end. Panic, fear and berserker rage—how often did they precede ecstasies? And music and drunkenness and all stimuli toward violent emotion must serve here too. Thus ecstasy was the pinnacle—or, more truly, the utter most abyss.

All violent emotions tended to make man’s consciousness approach that of a beast; the ecstasy led to that deepest point at which lay the consciousness of the Oneness between the individual and the World.

Frank Braun breathed deeply. He took the kernel of it all in his hand. Ecstasy was a reversal to the conditions of the lowest animal life, in which stimuli did not occasion the formation of representations but released the reaction immediately. It was as much an atavistic event as the birth of a child with a cleft palate or of a horse with divided hoofs. It was a condition in which the will and the representative faculty were undivided and all the boundaries of the external world obliterated, a condition that lacked the marks of the perception of space and time and the consciousness of individual willing. It lacked the reciprocal influence of the Non-I upon the I and vice versa: it was without perception or will. And so it happened that the I absorbed the Non—I and became a pure I. It became God—and that was the ultimate atavism of the human race.

Frank Braun got up, went to the window, and looked long into the colossal quietude of the night. Surely he was the victor now, but this victory gave him no joy, and he felt that every possibility lay only in defeat. And, in the last analysis, pure happiness was the only thing worth striving for, and was worth far more than even the most glorious victory in the realm of consciousness.

Pure happiness—it always lay behind and never before him. In the battle for existence when the first animals climbed out of the water and became accustomed to living on the land it most certainly must have been a moist element that was ideal for their continued existence. When the night animals needed to overcome their shyness of the light in order not to starve, it is certain that the light was bad and the dark was a goodness. This is the eternal lie of the “Good Old Days”, where the only way a person can find happiness is to climb down from the high rung on which he stands.

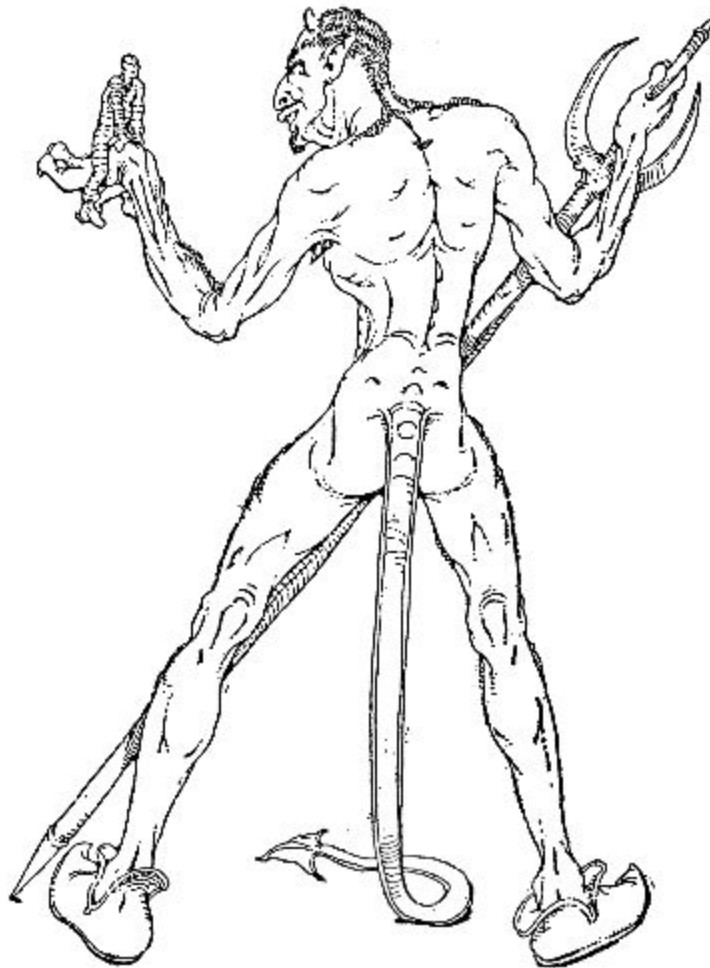
He took refuge in intoxication and lust and became an animal: but he was happy in such periods. And so ecstasy, the lowest plane to which man’s consciousness can return, affords him at the same time the highest happiness. But there is one thing that shatters all else—knowledge. And the free spirit, incurably delivered over to clear cognition, can no longer hide anything or betray anything and the heart is broken forever.

Something drove him to Teresa. He went out of his room and knocked at her door. He heard a whispering, and then the pushing back of the latch. Carmelina Gaspari stood before him, a candle in her hand.

“What do you want, sir?” she whispered.

“Give me the candle!” he said.

He took it and stepped up to Teresa’s bed. Gino slumbered on the floor at her feet. The saint lay there in deep sleep. She was as beautiful as the Mother of God, and her features radiated a great peace and an eternal happiness.





Chapter Twelve

“Banners which Proclaim the King of Hell have come to us.”

-Dante, Inferno, Can, 34



he peasants kept their word. Night after night they stood around the house and did not sleep. They relieved each other like sentries; new men would come up every three hours. All day long a youth guarded the door of the German's room; when he went out, he was closely followed by a dozen of them with stout cudgels in their hands. In the beginning it amused him to lead them around; he climbed up and down the slopes, and kept them on their feet for hours. They gasped but they did not give up. They would not let him set foot on the road but arrayed themselves in front of him and barred his way.

Yet he could have easily enough escaped them; it needed very little skill to deceive these yokels. But he didn't really care to. Something restrained him, a curiosity, and an avid desire to await something that might come. So he ran around restlessly, rowed on the lake, wandered through the lanes and climbed across the olive groves. At other times he would lie down for long hours in the grass and dream. None of these men spoke to him. That tormented him; he had to have someone to talk to. Raimondi disgusted him and he could not talk with Angelo, not even with the best will in the world.

He had even lost the goat Marfa now that he knew she belonged to the farmhand, he gave her sugar, as always, but he didn't take her along any more or speak to her. Finally he played a trick on the men. He starved them; he robbed them of the spiritual consolation that was their daily bread. In the evening, when the whole village came to Raimondi's house to conduct the saint to the prophet's hall, he went out. Then he made his wildest excursions and flew like a ball through the Scodra Valley. The consequence was that for this hour they selected the cleverest young men in the village. These had

to stay away from the meeting. That vexed them greatly, especially young Ulpo who led them. One evening as he came out of the house Frank Braun approached him. He pointed to the peak above the promontory of the crosses.

“Do you see that, my lad, we are going to climb around up there now for five hours? Does the notion amuse you?”

Ulpo looked up but he did not answer.

“I’ll tell you something,” the German continued, “we’ll make peace.

You don’t need to run after me anymore; I’ll go to the meeting with you, today— tomorrow—every day, if you want me to. But on one condition: it bores me to have you run behind me like dumb shadows and never open your mouths. You have to answer me!”

The man looked embarrassed. Then he turned around and talked to the cobbler Ratti who stood in the doorway. He shrugged his shoulders, spat and chewed at his great gray mustache. Was it not a great sin to talk to the tempter? In all events one must ask the prophet. At this moment Teresa stepped out of the house.

“Holy Sister,” said young Ulpo, “the gentleman wants to come to the meeting—”

The girl interrupted him.

“Yes, he may come,” she said.

They ventured no other word. The men took him in their midst and accompanied him to the hall as proud as if he had been a prize of war. They conducted him to the stage and placed a chair there for him, happy as children at being able to hold their big candles again. So he sat there, evening after evening. In compensation they talked to him during the day when he went out. They themselves never spoke, but they answered him when he addressed them.

“Are you twelve always my guards?” he asked Ulpo.

The fellow nodded.

“Yes, for the entire day. During the night there are two other groups who relieve each other.”

“And don’t you work anymore?”

Ulpo stared at him.

“Work is sin, now that the Kingdom of Heaven is so near. No one works in the village any longer. The prophet has ordained it so.”

Frank Braun sighed gently.

“So you’ve reached that point?” he thought. “It’s always the same thing! Whom the Lord’s spirit awakens, to him labor becomes a sin.”

Another time he asked, “Don’t you use the scourges any longer? Evening after evening they hang on the wall and are inactive.”

Giovanni Ulpo said, “The sacred wounds are to pain, but they are also to heal—such are the words of the prophet. Soon, however, they will have become mere scars.”

He opened his coat and his shirt and looked with satisfaction at the scurfy lines.

“But next Sunday blood shall flow again in a new battle against Satan.”

“Well, that’s a little change, anyhow,” the German laughed.

The prophet had made various preparations for this new battle. But these had little attraction to Frank Braun and he had no desire to watch. His contract with the men was really too advantageous for them and he determined to break it. He waited until evening and then declared that he did not care to go to the hall that night; they were to get ready to go walking with him. He laughed when he saw how downcast they were and was amused at his small malice.

Then they came and begged and he let them beg. Finally he gave in but declared that he would stay at home; they might watch him there in his room, then half of them would suffice. The men drew lots and six of them joyfully joined the procession; the others, among them Ulpo, remained sadly behind. Three stepped under his window, three remained before his door.

He sat down at his table. He wrote a long letter to Don Vincenzo and tore it up when it was finished. Then he wrote to Aloys Drenker and tore up that letter too. Someone knocked at the door; at his invitation Ulpo and the other men who guarded the door entered the room. They stammered a few words, and begged for permission to speak to their comrades through the window. He asked why they hadn’t gone down in front of the house?—they had not dared: he might leave the room in the meantime and hide

somewhere. They called up the others and Ulpo proposed that four more of them were to go to the hall—the others would suffice, one at the door, the other at the window.

“Why don’t all six of you go?” Frank Braun asked. “I promise you not to leave the house.”

But they did not trust him. Ulpo tore six strips of paper from an old newspaper, four large and two small ones. They drew lots and again Ulpo drew a small strip. Tears leaped into his eyes; silently he resumed his place at the door. Frank Braun heard him walk up and down in the hall with long strides, and between them his scarcely suppressed sighing. One hour passed after another. He went down to supper rather late; he called the two men into the guest room and invited them to sup with him. Pasquale ate, but Giovanni Ulpo could not swallow a bite; he even let his milk stand.

“They are all there, all of them,” he sighed, “Only we are not.”

Frank Braun took a crown out of his pocket.

“Heads or tails?” he cried. “One of you may go.”

“One is not enough here,” said Ulpo.

The German laughed.

“Two aren’t enough either—do you think I couldn’t manage both of you? But I shall not leave today. I want to go rowing. One of you must row with me.”

“Heads!” cried Giovanni Ulpo.

But the coin showed tails. Pasquale jumped up and ran out the door. The other broke into tears.

“Now I’ve been left alone here! Quite alone! And I have all the responsibility!”

Frank Braun pulled him up by the arm.

“Come, my boy! The night is fine, we’ll go rowing.”

Outside he took the fellow by the wrists, twisted them behind his back and pulled them up toward his shoulders. Thus he took him to the boat, and held him fast in spite of his struggles and cries. He took the rope of the boat and tied his hands fast to his back.

“Do you see, now you are my prisoner!” He laughed. “Keep still, your crying out does no good; your brothers are singing and no one will hear you. Or do you think that old Raimondi would help you, or Angelo?”

“Kill me, sir,” Ulpo whined, “kill me!”

“No,” said Frank Braun. “Why should I do that? You are a fool and yet a brave fellow! Come, row me out on the lake a bit; then I’ll accompany you to the devil hunters!”

He loosened the fetters and jumped into the boat. For a moment Ulpo hesitated, stood there confused, breathless and unable to move a limb. Then he jumped after him, fell upon his knees and kissed his hands. Frank Braun pushed him back.

“Take the oars!” he commanded. But he let him only pull a few strokes.

“Row back, you poor creature, why should I torment you?”

Slowly he went with the lad to Pietro’s hall. Maria Grazia was confessing her soul; they waited at the entrance until she had finished. Then Ulpo led the stranger in and all voluntarily made room. His face beamed with happiness, but his comrades grinned too, delighted to now have securely with them the man they were supposed to watch. They offered him a chair, immediately in front of them, but Frank Braun declined it and sat down on the bench next to them close by the wall. All the usual proceedings of the meeting were over—the praying and singing and the confessing. The prophet arose to give them the Holy Supper and Girolamo filled more than a dozen copper kettles with wine. Pietro prayed and consecrated these, and the boys and girls ran through the assembly and offered them to all.

Scuro alone took a great kettle and emptied it in mighty draughts; he had abjured all wine since the Lord had saved him, but no devout man could drink enough of the Blood of the Lamb. Teresa drank too, and Frank Braun saw how the blood rose into her pale cheeks. Then she handed the copper kettle to little Gino who, as usual, was crouching at her feet. Frank Braun looked over the assembly. The whole village was crowded into the barn. Except Raimondi, of course, and Angelo, who was with his goat. He also missed Sibylla Madruzzo. And it occurred to him that he had failed to see her for several evenings now. Was she ill?

The fanatics drank. The copper kettles were filled again and again, and under the prophet's prayerful hand their contents were transformed into the Savior's Blood. The children laughed furtively, many women babbled and sang the refrains of their songs. But the men sat on the benches, stood around and drank silently. The pitch torches threw their red light on the fevered heads and caused the dark features to gleam more redly and wildly. Their glow, reflected against the copper vessels, rolled through the crowd like glowing spears, and against the white signs with their pious inscriptions which hurt the eyes. A thick mist and a suffocating sickness lay over everything and made breathing almost unsupportable; but no one except himself seemed to notice it.

He brought his lips to a chink in the wooden wall and tried to inhale a little fresh air. Ronchi struck the floor with his staff and the music began. The triangle, the concertina and the tambourine beat out their driving cries. The musicians at the right and the twelve fellows at the left began to sing:

*“Even if we are sinners all the time:
Jesus died!
Even if the devil strides through the valleys of earth:
Jesus died!
We grasp our weapons; we take up the crown,
We hurry to help the Son of Man
And take the heavenly delights as our reward:
Jesus died!”*

They sang the stanza three times and then the congregation joined in. Now they all sang, the same words over and over again. They beat time with their hands and stamped with their feet. Their singing grew ever wilder and madder, and finally passed into a loud howling and crying. Frank Braun watched the crowd intently and observed the curious effect of these rhythmic sounds which seemed to heighten the fanatical intoxication from minute to minute.

But where lies the original cause that gives music this strange power, that can take people back to this “higher domain of our ancestors”, as

Goethe himself expressed it—our very remote ancestors, as nature’s history informs us.

Music is a breath from another time—that is certain. It is only structure and never material, is born out of the immense ocean of the negative which man calls emotion. There are many thousands of forms of all possible varieties of music and expressions of the will, but never its material appearance, only a shadowy inner quality of something that no being has any more. It is never a material phenomenon, only one of the will and is yet apparently a genuine thing in itself. It awakens emotions, whose possibilities we don’t know and whose meaning we can’t grasp. It gives us things that we have never seen and never will see . . .

Yet when we believe in it, it gives us happiness. It gives a happiness like intoxication, like that of lust does—to those that believe in it. Not the final happiness, yet our happiness is a sinking back down into a forgotten time, is a great transformation of consciousness.

Music is one of the best ways to succeed in going there.

The prophet tore Frank Braun from his reflections. He made an address of only a few words. He said that one must combat Satan with weapons from the Redeemer’s armory, and that anyone who desired should now step forth. The twelve young men laid their candles on the floor, threw off their coats and shirts and took the scourges, rods and whips from the wall. They knelt before the image of Christ and the prophet gave each of them another draught of the Lamb’s Blood.

Then they raised their arms and stood quietly for a moment. The tailor gave the sign. The music sounded and the scourges fell on the naked bodies. And at the same time “The Song of the Wounds” resounded through the hall from all sides:

*“The wounds of Christ’s sacrificial blood,
The wounds—wounds—flowing wounds,
Your wounds, yes, Your wounds,
Wounds of power—wounds—wounds of courage
And wounds, wounds of the heart, wounds!
Wounds from the scourge! Wounds from the thorns!*

*Wounds from the nails! Wounds from the spear thrust!
Praise God, for Your wounds!”*

No one castigated himself; the lash of each fell on another's body. They struck without mercy, heedlessly, for the glory of the Lord; their eyes turned up and their bodies writhed under the terrible blows. And they lifted their legs in measured rhythm, jumped up and down or danced in a circle. Frank Braun observed Teresa. She had raised herself up in her chair, bent her body and her head forward and looked fixedly at the pious dancers. Gino knelt beside her and at times she received a copper vessel from his hands and took a deep draught of the sacred drink.

“Strike on!” she cried.

“Strike harder! Oh, wounds! Wounds! Wounds!”

The twelve young men on the stage were maddened, their blood dripped on the floor and splattered against the wall. One fell and the others lifted him up again. And the scourges clattered more and more wildly on their bodies. Others crowded to the stage, stripped themselves, grasped the rods and mingled with the dancers.

Matilda Venier was the first woman to go up; four or five others followed her. Now and then someone collapsed; they dragged him aside and another immediately took his place. Teresa pushed Carmelina Gaspari in the side.

“Scourge yourself”, she cried, “Scourge yourself!”

The young girl quivered but obediently stripped and the prophet gave her a whip. Her body trembled, and she remained standing motionless near the chair of the saint. Next to her Girolamo Scuro was stripping himself. His nostrils trembled; his mouth stood wide open and showed his huge shining teeth. He knotted his shirt and coat into a bundle and sat down on it; then he pulled off his boots, stood up and pulled off his trousers. Then he stood there completely naked. He snatched a scourge from the wall, knelt before the image of Christ and prayed.

Then with a wild howl he leaped among the dancers. And wherever his scourge hit, someone's skin was slashed into rags. Venier's wife, somewhat exhausted, had withdrawn and, breathing uneasily, was crouching on the first bench. But the sight of the raging giant seemed to give her new

strength. Fervently she jumped up and down and, in a moment, had stripped the skirts from her legs, and, had leaped, naked, into the circle of devil—hunters, prepared to shed her blood from head to foot for her Redeemer.

And as these two did, soon others mingled quite naked with the crowd. Why wear these trousers and skirts which served only to protect half the body and deprive it of the bloody and gracious blows of the scourge! Away with garments, with everything—away! It was a pious deed.

And they all stamped and cried and flourished their whips. More and more crowded up; they pushed the benches against the walls or piled them up to make more room. And all this free space was filled with dancers. No one excluded himself; only the aged men and women and little boys and girls sat or stood, huddled together against the walls. The prophet knelt naked before the image of Christ; a rain of blows fell on his naked back. He scarcely seemed to feel it, and neither writhed nor quivered, he lay in fervent prayer with his forehead against the floor before the Crucified One.

Frank Braun did not take his eyes from the saint. Her eyes stood wide open and greedily drank in the wild scene. And in them he seemed to see reflected once more this horrible image; all these crazed, naked dancers who lacerated their bodies for the honor of the Kingdom of God.

Her lips opened and she sang aloud through the hall:

*“Wounds from the scourge! Wounds from the thorns!
Wounds from the nails! Wounds from the spear thrust!
Praise God, for Your wounds!”*

“Give me!” she cried.

She snatched the copper kettle from the boy’s hands and drank deep. Then she arose. She saw Carmelina who still stood beside her trembling and quivering, naked to the hips.

“Strip yourself!” she cried.

Carmelina obeyed and let her skirt fall. The saint turned to the musicians.

“And you, you!” she cried. “Would you serve God only with those instruments?”

They all jumped up, but Teresa took a step toward them.

“Not all at the same time!” she said. “Linda, you come, and you, Clementina Cornaro—and you too, Tullio Tramonte! The rest of you sit still and play!”

Tullio, a thin lad of seventeen, stripped himself and Clementina Cornaro, a stout, voluptuous woman with fiery red hair, tore off her garments. But the girl Linda hesitated, then slowly and fearfully took off her dress, but kept on her shift and petticoat. Teresa hurried to the fifteen-year-old girl.

“You are afraid, Linda!” she cried. “You are afraid of the grace of your Redeemer!”

She pulled the shift from her shoulders, grasped her petticoat and tore it off.

“The Lord will bless you; the blood of your loins will wash away your sins.”

She pushed Carmelina over to the other three and took a heavy dog whip from the wall.

“Kneel down!” she commanded. “Bow your head to earth and pray to the Lord.”

The four bodies were clean and shiny; none bore traces of former scars and wounds. But the Lord’s grace put such strength into the saint’s weak arms that her blows were more fearful than those of the huge farmhand. In a few minutes the bodies were covered with blood, the skin burst and hung in shreds. The four writhed on the floor and cried and howled in their torment. In her desperate pain Carmelina plunged her teeth deep into the round shoulder of the Cornaro woman; while the latter embraced the lad with her fevered arm and dug her nails deep into his flesh. They writhed and twisted themselves into a confused knot, encircled each other with their arms and legs and steamed with sweat and blood. And repeatedly the saint’s heavy whip whizzed down on the broken flesh.

The prophet leaped up, faltered, staggered and fell down before Teresa.

“Beat me!” he cried.

And the whip curled in bloody stripes around his arms and chest. Now Scuro pushed his way forward, and the Venier woman.

“Me too! Me too!”

They knelt and received the saint’s blows of grace. But she cried out aloud:

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give honor unto Him, for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride is ready!”

They all crowded around, each one desiring the blessed blows of her whip. And again it was Ronchi who created order. He let them approach and kneel down by twos and threes and the saint’s arm was tireless. Every back received the blows of her scourge and it seemed as if the wounded flesh gleamed redder and that her stripes were broader and stood out above all the others.

All the while she did not forget those whose bodies had been untouched up to this point. Over and over she called to the musicians:

“Strip yourself, Silvia—come here, Alessandro Riccioli!”

And it was as if her eyes gleamed more brightly over those whom no blood had yet defiled, as if her voice rejoiced more loudly when she covered these white, naked bodies with a moist red garment. And she did not grow weary. Her blows fell ever heavier, ever more terrible, as if she wanted to drown the hall in a sea of blood. Her white garment, fastened tight around her hips with a broad rope, was covered with blood; her loose tresses flew and threw their black shadows forward at each blow.

The spaces in the corners and along the walls were filled with exhausted people, the stage grew ever emptier. One after another crept down, utterly worn out, half-conscious, broken; they lay like dying beasts. They grasped the kettles and drank the holy wine with famished thirst. At Ratti’s feet Giovanni Ulpo, wounded horribly, lay on his belly; his back seemed one horrible wound. But the saint was not satisfied; a half mad laugh arose from her blood drunkenness.

“Is there no one left?” she cried. “Does no one else desire the grace of the Lord?”

She lifted the whip high and beckoned with it.

“And the spirit and the bride say:

‘Come! And he who hears, let him come. And whoever is athirst, let him come. And whoever wants, let him partake of the water of life freely!’”

A trembling old man stepped forward and tried with difficulty to take off his coat. A woman limped up on crutches; two other aged women followed. Girolamo helped them, and the saint pitilessly lashed their poor old flesh. She stood under the image of Christ, the bloody whip in her hand. Her glances flew around the hall and sought some forgotten sacrifice. And suddenly she cried aloud in a pious inspiration:

“Suffer the little children to come unto me!”

Venier’s wife reached for her daughter, but Fiammetta fled and hid under a bench. The children screeched and screamed, crept under their mother’s skirts and hid themselves behind the beams. But their parents got them nevertheless. Scuro pulled little Fiammetta forth by the leg and held her fast. Her mother tore her garments from her body and they brought the emaciated creature stark naked to the saint.

“Kneel down!” Teresa commanded. “Pray!”

Ratti brought his children, and the Cornaro woman brought her red-haired daughter. Everywhere the mothers pulled forth their howling, struggling little ones, tore their poor garments from their bodies and dragged them forward. Teresa stood there quietly but her glance hunted through the hall like that of a bird of prey.

“There!” she cried. “Catch him! Nicolino Gaspari is sitting up there!”

The ten-year old boy had climbed up one of the supporting beams and hung huddled together behind a sign. The red pitch torch which stuck in the beam’s other side threw its biting fumes into his weeping eyes and almost roasted him. Scuro ran through the hall. He jumped high, grasped the boy’s two legs and pulled him down. He stripped the howling boy and threw him across the heads of the people onto the heap of children.

“Sing!” cried the saint. “Sing!”

And her maddened voice arose:

“Christ’s bloody covenant of wounds—”

The crowd howled the “Song of the Wounds” and drowned the pitiful screaming of that heap of children’s bodies. The holy whip whirled mercilessly and the saint took good care that no stroke went wild and that every one of the quivering bodies bore a blood red seam as a sign of the Lord’s great favor.

Frank Braun saw the saint lift the scourge and kiss it fervently. The children crept and fled crying; but she strode on erect and her naked feet waded in blood. He saw her take one of the children and press her lips upon the bloody stripes which her hand had inflicted.

His arms trembled in a strange excitement and he profoundly felt the close identity of lust, religion and cruelty. This wild cruelty which lashed the senses was that entire imaginative process of lower civilization by which man was to be brought nearer to his God.

This rage of blood thirsty madness, this sight of bloody, tormented sacrifices, this intoxication of strong wine, this fevered dancing and this restless, deafening music—by every possible means men drew and flung themselves into the depths, down to the last abyss, down to the original consciousness of the world, to that blind will which was its innermost being. Away from all heights and down to the ultimate origin of all things—down to God!

The saint threw her scourge on the ground, stepped forward and beckoned to the congregation with both arms. They came and crowded around her in a circle, many bloody bodies around this white fiend.

“Jesus Christ demands a sacrifice,” she cried. “Who is willing to give up his body for the Lord’s redemption?”

None answered. They stood silent, with open mouths, as if they did not understand what the saint demanded. Only here and there from the corners sounded the wailing and whining of the children. Then the prophet pushed himself to her side.

“Watch and pray!” he cried. “The tempter is near, the Antichrist! I still see how the host of Satan threatens us; he would overcome us! We must fight and struggle. Who would give up his life for Christ?”

The wife of Venier pushed herself forward:

“Beat me!” she cried. “Beat me to death! I will gladly die for the souls of my brothers!”

And young Ulpo arose, staggering, with difficulty.

“Sacrifice me!” he stammered.

Now no one wanted to remain behind, and they pushed and fought in their holy zeal.

“I am prepared!”

“Take my life!”

“I will gladly die!”

Teresa looked around in the circle undecided. Then her eyes fell upon Gino who peeped out from under her chair. That is where he had crept when the children were grabbed and pulled forward and no one had noticed him. His body was clean of any drop of blood, untouched, and undefiled—the only one there. The saint’s eyes gleamed and she stretched her arms aloft.

“The Lord has given me a sign!” she cried. “Thanks be to the Lord and His goodness!”

She beckoned to the boy and he crept forth and nestled familiarly against her. She lifted him high in her arms, embraced him fervently and kissed him. Then she set him on a chair and knelt before him.

“Will you give up your body for Him who died for us on the Cross?” she asked aloud, and immediately translated her words into the sign language. The deaf and dumb boy understood the words well but not her meaning. He nodded eagerly, almost merrily. Again she clasped him in her arms and covered his face with fervent kisses.

“Gino will die for you!” she cried. “The Lord has chosen him!”

Girolamo grabbed him and would have stripped him, but the boy cried out and pressed against the saint.

“Let him be,” Teresa said. “He doesn’t need the scourge. His sacrifice is worth more than all your wounds!”

She drew herself up with the boy in her arms.

“Go, bring nails and a hammer!”

Scuro started up as if to run home but Ronchi held him back. He had put up the signs and now fetched a heavy hammer from a corner. He also brought a handful of long, large nails. Teresa took the boy’s hand and knelt with him before the image of Christ. Immediately too, the prophet cast himself on the ground and in a moment the whole congregation was kneeling. He spoke and they all repeated after him the holy prayer to the five wounds of Jesus.

“O Jesus, I kiss Thy five holy wounds and thank Thee for the many and cruel pains which Thou didst suffer in all Thy wounds for the sake of

our redemption. I pray Thee to let the water and the blood which flowed from Thy blessed heart not be lost to us, but lead us into Thy Kingdom unto eternal happiness. Amen.”

Then the saint turned to the boy, and with gentle, tender touches signified to him that he was to lie down on his back. She spread out his two arms to both sides, placed his palms upward and crossed his naked feet. Gino lay there without any presentiment of what was to happen, merry as at a game. Teresa kissed the palms of his hands, and then she beckoned to the farmhand. Girolamo took the hammer, knelt down, and placed the long nail upon one hand. Immediately the boy withdrew his hand, looked at the man horrified and put his arms around Teresa.

But she succeeded in calming him, she kissed him and caressed him and stretched out his arms to both sides. She bent very close to him so that he could only see her and not the huge man with the red goiter whom he feared. Quietly the boy let his hand lie, and allowed Scuro to grasp his left hand and hold it firmly to the floor. Teresa turned a little and saw how he touched the middle of the palm with a nail and lifted the hammer.

“Strike!” she cried.

With a cry she threw herself upon Gino, kissed his mouth and dug her teeth into the boy’s thin lips. And the blow fell and fastened the small hand firmly to the wooden floor. The boy thrust her back with his right arm; he croaked pitifully and lifted himself up. An unspeakable horror appeared on his features, and with his weak strength he tried to tear his left hand loose. But he tugged in vain and only tore into his wounds and increased his torments. The saint sprang up and her breast heaved in swift breathing. Matilda Venier grasped the boy’s feet and held them firmly. Scuro stepped across him and grasped the other arm.

“Hurry!” cried Teresa. “Hurry!”

Again Girolamo set a long nail upon the palm of the hand and brought down his hammer. But he missed his aim and the hammer slipped and came down on the thin fingers. Gino drew himself up, moaning pitifully, and with a desperate exertion he succeeded in tearing his left hand from the nail that held it. He threw himself around and covered the right hand which Scuro still held as if in an iron vise, with his head and body. The saint sank to her knee and her loud cry blended with the terrible, hoarse croaking of the boy.

“Make an end!” she cried. “Break his skull, Scuro!—Make an end!”

And the arms of the huge man came down. The heavy hammer fell on the boy’s head with a dull crash. He died without a sound. On her knees Teresa dragged herself to her chair, clung to its back, folded her hands and prayed to the image of Christ. Then, exhausted, she let her head fall. Matilda Venier and Ronchi lifted her up and set her down. She held her hand before her face and a morbid twitching passed through her body.

“Is he dead?” she whispered. “Is he dead?”

The prophet nodded.

“Yes, Holy Sister. He died the sacrificial death for the Lord.”

They took the little body and carried it to one side, laid it in a corner where they had thrown the candles. They stood rigid and dumb and a dull brooding hovered over the wide hall. Then Ronchi called the musicians. They came and took their instruments: triangle, tambourine and concertina. They raised their voices and the congregation, as if relieved from some horrible pressure, joined in, and the song of the Bride of the Lamb rang jubilantly through the hall:

*“The bride overflows with joy,
For God looks on her beauty with desire,
She glows in the sun,
She is led to the bridal palace
Into the house of bliss, to a proud rest,
To her King’s delight.
All lamentation,
Hesitation,
Summer’s heat and,
Thunder’s crash
Are gone!
The Lamb of God has overcome!”*

And while they sang, the prophet caused all the vessels to be refilled with fresh wine. He prayed and spread out his hands and blessed the wine and transformed it. He offered the first draught to the saint, but she shook her head and refused. She sat motionless in her chair. But the others drank. They hunted up their clothes and hung them over their bloody limbs and drank the wine and did not cease from their singing.

Frank Braun rose from his bench. His head ached. He felt as if he himself had suffered the blow which struck the boy's head. It all whirled around him like a confused picture; half blinded, he groped along the wall to the exit. He passed through the door and staggered out. Then he sat down on a large heap of firewood that lay under the tall lime trees in front of Pietro's garden. He climbed higher up on the pile, lay down, rested his head on his arms and stared up at the sky. He tried to think, to reach some clear idea concerning all this—but he did not succeed.

Only to draw breath—a deep breath, to fill the lungs full of the pure, fresh air of the night. Then he saw the people coming from the hall. They came silently and quietly, alone and in groups; they scattered here and there toward their houses. No one spoke to any of the others; they did not even say good-night. He saw Venier coming, with two children in his arms; Fiammetta and the older boy held on to his coat. He saw the hunchbacked cobbler, Ratti, and his tall thin wife; they were going home with their eight children. They all brought their children, sore and beaten to be sure—but still alive! And it seemed to him that on this evening these creatures showed a greater love for their offspring and carried them more tenderly in their arms.

Only Gino remained behind, only little dumb Gino. This parish child, fatherless and motherless—and there was no one who bothered himself over his poor thin body.

“Poor little fellow!” he thought.

Finally the prophet came out and the dwellers in his house. Teresa crossed the threshold and Carmelina Gaspari tried to support her. But, utterly worn out herself, she faltered, stumbled and fell to earth. Linda Vuota lifted her up, and Ronchi undertook to lead the saint. Scuro came to help him, but Teresa cried out and pushed him away; then the American approached and supported her from the other side. Slowly, step by step, they climbed up to his house.

He saw them enter, one after another, even young Ulpo, who was leading his friend, Pasquale. The farmhand was the last, and closed the low door thoughtfully. Frank Braun got up and went through the streets. No one was to be seen; a deathlike calm lay over Val di Scodra. He went home and up to his room. He stepped to the window and looked out. There was no one to guard him tonight. He undressed and rubbed himself down from head to foot, using his sponge and cloth vigorously, as if his body, too, were flecked with blood—like all the others tonight. He went to bed. But he did not sleep.

His thoughts ran and hurried their way back to the prophet's hall. He entered through the open door and almost fell back as the fumes of pitch torches, of sweat and blood, and the hot steam of the wine thickly beat into his face. He went in, opened the window and sat down on a bench. How good was this draught, the fresh night air was life itself which came into this dim cavern filled with the fumes of madness. Far in a corner he saw Gino, a wretched little heap among the large candles. And that was all that was left over from this night's battle with the devil.

Once again he saw that wild picture in the red glow of the torches. The prophet blessed the wine and they all drank. They all sang and danced and seized the scourges. And the blood flowed. It was like at a bull fight. First the Cuadrillo came, and the Toreadores played and jumped around the bull with their gay clothes. Then the first blood flowed and the Picadores fell and the mares collapsed with their bodies slit. But the Banderilleros stuck their arrows and thick, red drops oozed out of the steer's back. It was like a small, delicate prelude.

That was how the saint had summoned the children to her. Then however the Matador raises his blade. And the sacrifice falls, dumbly, without a sound. That was how the boy had fallen by Girolamo's hand. It was just like at a bull fight. One was disgusted and complained and swore never to go again. One gave expression to one's contempt for the repulsive spectacle and could not find words hateful enough for the wretched mob that rejoiced over it.

And this went on all week until Monday—one complained as late as at the two o'clock luncheon that day. And forty-five minutes later one called a carriage and drove to the Corrida and at three o'clock was in one's box on the shady side. And one saw the horses tread in their own entrails and saw

the sand grow red with blood. And yet one stayed until the last steer had fallen. What was it? What drove us to the arena and fastened us to the benches, in spite of all our superior knowledge, in spite of all reflection that made us nauseated with ourselves?

It was the cruel lust of our ancestors, the mad greed for blood which was the imagination of our forefathers and which still refused to die in us: The eternal, dark yearning for happiness and for primitive states of consciousness—and for God!

Thus there was a deep significance in the fact that the Toreadores knelt before the picture of the Madonna. Even in the pious land of Spain—no one could be more pious than they were. Religion, lustfulness and cruelty! Why had he not interfered when Teresa called the children? When her bloody whip fell on the small, naked, emaciated bodies? When she lacerated Gino's lips, when that drunken beast nailed the boy's hand to the floor? And when that same frightful monster lifted the hammer and let it hurtle down through the fragile skull deep into the child's brain?—what had restrained him?

“It would have availed nothing!” he sighed. “What could I have done against all those madmen?”

But he knew very well that he was lying. No, no, it had been neither fear nor reflection that held him back. It was something else. It was the eternal sorcery that chained him to his bench, it was the ancestral curse that no mortal could escape—it was the conquering power of blood. He had held his breath; he had opened his eyes wide. He had stretched himself and craned his neck so that no detail of that which happened might escape him. And though he sat so still on his bench, he had borne a share in all that took place in the prophet's hall.

And yet he was so much the superior of these people, who grasped only what they happened to be doing, and took a share only in what concerned them. But he experienced everything that happened within himself and all the raging madness burned in his soul and sputtered in hot flame. Those others were drunken, and leaped and sang and swung their scourges and yet scarcely knew what they were doing. But not for a moment did his terrible, ever—wakeful consciousness desert him.

And whatever had happened: it was himself who had done it. He lay quietly on his back and did not move a limb. His breath came quietly; his heart beat so gently that he himself did not feel it. It seemed to him as if a

stranger were resting there, as if he himself were far away and had nothing to do with this long outstretched body.

And he said aloud:

“This is the future.”

Suddenly, without any reason, this thought came to him and flew through the night like a bright meteor. But he did not lose it, he watched it carefully, and found the place where the meteor fell. Then he took the brown meteorite, polished it and gave it a handsome setting. For it was a thing that had detached itself from his star, and flew afar through endless distances and became an individual being.

Like man himself! In the beginning man was with God and part of the indivisible All, and he tore himself loose in spite of it. From this awareness of self over the course of billions of years there developed an awareness of the contradiction, “I”—and the world! And yet a part of the All clung to this “I”, was still imprisoned in this physical body, grew with it, died with it and was inseparable from its earthly remains.

And a great desire for liberation caused this soul to seek a false path and grope in the shameful darkness. It always ran back by the way which it had come to its original awareness of the “I” instead of to the “Not—I”, and did not know that the goal was at the other end.

The soul was conscious of the contradiction between the “I” and the “Not—I”, but the soul accepted the physical body as part of the “I”, even as the “I” itself did, and did not realize that the physical body was only a part of the “Not—I”. Thus man’s physical body became the unfortunate bridge that always led the soul back to the physical world of which it was a part. And all those souls driven by desire passed over it and descended deeper and deeper until they sank into God.

Yet how comical it was when the pious cried out that one must conquer the body! Their words were so wise, yet their understanding was so wrong. They did not conquer the body—but rather strengthened its power by all they did. They conquered the soul of man and became as beasts; they conquered the beasts inside and became as God.

But the time must come for the striding forth of the liberated human being. When the knowledge becomes so deep and so firmly rooted that each one knows his body is nothing other than some tree that stands in the forest,

than some bird that flies in the air: than any foreign object that lies far in the distance! When each passionately feels that his body has nothing in common with his soul—and is as alien to him as a stone in the street, when the assurance reaches each consciousness that the external world may be all-embracing, yet, it fails to hold one thing, namely, the soul—then that great day will dawn—

Then the soul of man will tend the body well, like a temple, like a good house in which one dwells. Only, it will be a stranger, something external from us, and this knowledge alone will be the great conquest of the body. Then the bridge that leads downward will be broken; then the lunacy of our forefathers will perish; then the eternal desires will laugh happily as they kiss freedom and truth amidst their tears over the dark errors of the ages.

He smiled—he was almost happy at this moment.

“Now I will return into my body,” he thought.

Thus he fell asleep. He awoke late. He took his bathrobe, went down and sprang into the lake. It occurred to him that he had never seen one of the people of Val di Scodra bathing. Not even the boys splashed in the water. He dressed and went into the guest room; he called for the landlord but no one came. He looked through the whole house, went into the cellar and into the kitchen. Finally he met Angelo in front of the stable.

“Where is your master?” he asked.

“He wants to hire a maid,” answered the man. “He has gone to town.”

“On foot?”

“No, by the stage. It goes today. He left an hour ago.”

Frank Braun snorted at him.

“Why didn’t you tell me? I would have gone with him.”

The man grinned stupidly.

“Go put on the water for breakfast,” he commanded him.

At that moment the clear whistle of a motor car shrilled through the silent valley. Frank Braun looked up and turned and gazed toward the west. There, at one narrow spot between the cliffs, one had a view of the road. The car raced by—a thick cloud of sand was scattered down the slope. But he had recognized the car; it was the powerful motor car of the hotel.

“When is it coming back?” he asked the man.

Angelo laughed and nodded. Frank Braun seized him by the arms and shook him.

“Listen, my man, as well as you can! The auto from the city has just passed on the way to Turazzo—”

“That’s where I come from!” said Angelo.

“Thank God there’s something at last that will interest you! How long does the car stay there?”

“How am I to know that?” grinned the man.

“But you do know at what time it usually returns when it comes from there in the morning?”

“In the afternoon,” said the fellow.

“When, in the afternoon?”

Angelo pondered.

“Well,” he said, “well—”

“Is the sun still in sight?” Frank Braun asked him.

Again Angelo hesitated.

“No, you can’t see it any longer. But it is still quite light.”

He spoke hesitatingly, questioningly; this strange phenomenon seemed to bother him. Frank Braun laughed.

“One doesn’t see the sun because the mountains hide it,” he explained. “Very well then, it passes sometime after five; that’s probably right. Now pay attention, Angelo! At four o’clock—do you know when it’s four o’clock?”

He nodded: “Oh, yes, if you tell me.”

“I will if I can. But in all events remember this: When the sun stands over the mountains there,” he pointed to the west and Angelo observed his gesture—

“Very well, when the sun stands above Monte Almegio, carry my handbag up to the road. Do you understand? You must not wait till the sun is beyond the mountains; you must go while it stands above them.”

Angelo nodded eagerly.

“I’ll hit the right time!” he said.

Frank Braun continued, “Then sit down in the road and wait for me. You must not tell anyone that I’m leaving, do you hear?”

Angelo laughed. He knew that the stranger was being watched, even if he took no interest in the reason.

“If anyone asks you what you’re doing with my handbag, say that you’re to deliver it to the chauffeur! I’ll pack it now and then you can take it and hide it in the stable. But don’t let anyone see you! Do you understand? Also when you go take care that no one sees you!”

Angelo grew serious. The vehemence with which the gentleman spoke made it all seem excessively important to him.

“I’ll climb up the goat path,” he said softly.

Frank Braun nodded.

“Yes, do that, and bring Marfa along.”

He gave him a ten crown note.

“There, take it! And when I sit in the auto you’ll get another.”

Angelo held the note loosely as if he did not dare to grasp it.

“Sir,” he stammered. “Sir,—”

“It’s all right!” said Frank Braun.

Then he went into the house. Angelo boiled eggs, and brought him milk, bread and ham; so he breakfasted.

“For the last time in Val di Scodra!” he murmured.

He had an excellent appetite and ate twice as much as usual. He packed his handbag hastily and whistled for Angelo. He went down the stairs ahead of him and out the door. There was no one else to be seen. He beckoned to Angelo who had thrown a large sack over the bag and, with a grin of self-importance, carried it into the stable.

Slowly he walked toward the village. Where were his guards now? Was he no longer being watched? He was almost sorry; it would be more amusing to play a little trick on them than to go away freely and publicly. He went through the streets and among the houses. There was no one anywhere; the whole village seemed empty and dead. The sun burned straight down; and on the round stones before the church rested an ugly

mangy dog. He knew it well: it was Fido, the night watchman Ratti's dog—and nothing else. Not even the children were playing in the streets.

“Is the entire village still asleep?” he thought.

He listened sharply for some sound in the torrid silence. Then he went toward the end of the valley and climbed up to the American's barn. He opened the door and entered. No one was there, but it was evident that some order had been created. The benches were clean and the floor had been washed. The copper kettles and candles had been carried away, and the scourges were gone from the wall. He looked for the body of little Gino—it had disappeared. He climbed out through the window and looked toward the prophet's house.

Nothing was stirring. Great, blue dragonflies played over the brook that ran through the garden. He followed the narrow path that ran along the brook, between willows and the hedge roses. There he saw someone crouching and swiftly stepped up to him. It was Giovanni Ulpo. He was clad only in his trousers and was very busy anointing his chest and back with some malodorous unguent. He had been washing his bloody shirt in the brook and had hung it in the bushes to dry.

“Where are the people of Val di Scodra?” Frank Braun asked. “There is no one in the streets and the village seems abandoned.”

“They are in their houses,” the man answered. “Everyone is preparing himself and putting on festive garments. The prophet has commanded it.”

“Is this a feast day?”

Ulpo nodded.

“Yes,” he said quietly, “The feast of the saint. The saint will ascend to Heaven today.”

“What is she going to do?” Frank Braun asked.

“Ascend to Heaven. She has announced it herself. The prophet wrote it down and Ratti and Ronchi have read it out in all the houses.”

“What is going to happen?”

“I don't know. First Gino will be buried; then a procession will be arranged. That's all I know.”

Frank Braun remembered that, in the night, he had also seen Ulpo enter Pietro's house.

“Weren’t you at the prophet’s last night?” he asked. “What happened there?”

“Nothing, sir. We prayed and I believe that the saint prayed all night. But I was too weak and fell asleep. At sunrise I left.”

“And you know nothing else?”

“Nothing, sir.” Frank Braun turned to go. “Ah,” he cried, “you’ve forgotten me? Or did the prophet suspend having me watched during this festive day? And suppose I were to leave today?”

Young Ulpo looked up and a violent fright seized him. He sprang up at once and without another word ran in long leaps toward the prophet’s house. Frank Braun looked after him.

“There I’ve gone and done something very stupid!” he thought.

Slowly he went on, sat down beside the brook and watched a great spider which was weaving its web diagonally across the water. A ladybug was caught in the threads; but it got free before the spider came. Two thick flies were in it also and he looked on as the spider spun them in and sucked them. He went farther, stamped on the grass of the shore and was amused to see small, green frogs jump into the water.

“I hope they’ll eat the spider,” he thought.

When he came home he saw Ulpo standing below his window with five other men. They looked tired and battered, but their glances showed that they would hold him if he tried to go, and that there was no thought of setting him free.

“This is a fine mess,” he thought.





Chapter Thirteen

“The King himself was gloriously arrayed in a velvet robe with delightful golden braid, and a golden crown was placed upon his head. And the Queen was also gloriously dressed in a velvet gown, she also had a golden crown placed upon her head.”

-H. Gresbeck, Summary of that which occurred in the city of Munster in the year MDXXXV.

“Whoever knows the power of the dance dwells in God, for he knows how love kills. Allah be praised!”

-Dschalaleddin Rumi



Rank Braun went to his rooms; they seemed bare and cold now that there was nothing in them that belonged to him. Impatience seized him and an ardent desire to get away from Val di Scodra. Why had he not gone already that morning? Then he would have escaped from the dirty hands of these peasants! And for the first time fear came upon him. Quietly, indefinitely and slowly creeping up into his throat. He looked out—now ten were standing there. And Ratti ran up to them from the village with short, hasty steps. He wore his tall leather helmet and the short saber dangled around his legs. They put their heads together and whispered. Then Ulpo and Pasquale entered the house, climbed the stairs and knocked at his door.

“What do you want?” he asked.

They begged him to come along to Gino’s burial.

“No!” he cried. “I will not go!”

But he reconsidered. Wouldn’t it be better to mingle with the crowd? Surely this burial would not pass without some new, wild excitement; in

that case he would not be watched so closely and might easily find an opportunity to escape.

“Are you so anxious to be present?” he said quickly. “Very well then, I’ll go with you. Come for me when it’s time.”

The two went; he threw himself down on the bed and considered how he might flee. He called Angelo, repeated all his directions, and insisted that the latter be circumspect. Thank Heaven, he seemed to have understood. How was he going to manage to get away during the burial? He thought of the wildest plans. Should he send Angelo into the village while they were all out in the churchyard, and let him set fire to five or six houses? Then they might run back and forget him for the moment. And it would be amusing to look down from above and see Val di Scodra go up in flames! A pleasant farewell! But he didn’t even laugh; a breathless restlessness seized him which made even the most childish thoughts seem worthy of consideration. He wanted to get away; he had to get away—there was something which he felt he had to flee from at any cost. It took a powerful effort to master himself and to think quietly for a moment. He decided to stand back as far as possible at Gino’s funeral, first to remain quite still and then, by walking backwards very gradually step by step, to approach the gate of the churchyard. Then, when they were all singing or scourging themselves or practicing some other mischief, he would escape quickly. He would run up to the road and follow it—the motor car would catch up with him somewhere.

He was wet with perspiration as if he had already been trotting for several hours along the dusty road. Someone knocked at the door. He gave a violent start. He recognized Ulpo’s voice, jumped up, and dipped his head and hands in the washbasin. The refreshing coolness helped him, and he felt a little calmer.

“Go on down,” he cried, “I’ll follow you directly.”

In front of the house he met the twelve men under Ratti’s leadership.

“Why, how you look!” he called out to them.

Each had wrapped himself in a great linen cloth, his head protruding through a slit in the middle; in their hands they carried thick candles.

“The prophet has commanded it.” Ulpo declared.

Ratti headed the procession with drawn saber; they followed him in rank and file. Frank Braun went last of all between Pasquale and Giovanni Ulpo. At the church they turned away to the left.

“Aren’t you going into the church yard?” he asked.

“No, to the prophet’s house,” Ulpo answered.

There was no one to be seen on the street. Ratti’s dog was still lying in the same spot; it looked up curiously but did not stir. They passed by the barn; only in the American’s garden did he see a few people through the bushes. Before the door of the house the men took up their stand; only Ratti crossed the threshold and Frank Braun followed him. The hall windows were darkened by hangings; a few candles dimly lighted up the place. When his eyes had accustomed themselves a little to the dusk, he saw a small brown coffin on two chairs in the background. He approached. There, swaddled in white clothes, lay little Gino.

They had washed his face; only his hair was still covered with coagulated blood. His hands were hidden among the linens. Ronchi approached. He lifted the chair onto the bench and set two candlesticks with burning candles upon it; then a warm glow fell on the pale little face. The tailor was also covered with a white cloth.

Frank Braun looked around him: there were more people in this guise, both men and women. No one spoke; they glided through the dusky room like white shadows. Then he heard whispering voices from the stairs. He looked up at the white figures; there came Venier and his wife, Scuro, Alvassi the smith, and old Ulpo, then the Cornaro woman, Maria Grazia and Celestina Nosclere.

Soon the room was filled. Behind them the prophet descended. He looked strange enough; a bright red woolen shawl was wrapped around him, carelessly thrown over his left shoulder and fastened around his body with a woman’s girdle. On his head he wore a large crown cut out of pasteboard and covered with gilt paper; in his right hand he carried a short staff, thickly wreathed with olive foliage and probably meant to represent a scepter. The prophet slowly approached the coffin, remained standing there and looked back.

Then the saint came down the stairs. She wore the same white garment as yesterday, and seemed not to have removed it during the night. It was

covered with dust and dirt and spotted with the blackish-red stains of blood. Her hair hung far down but on her head she carried a gilt crown like the prophet's. Her eyes were closed, her lips moved in prayer; she walked slowly and painfully as if she were about to break down under the weight of her pains. Carmelina Gaspari and Linda Vuoto led her, almost carried her and supported her tenderly. The saint went to the coffin and the women hurried to bring her a chair. But she waved them away, knelt down, and rested her head and hands upon the little coffin.

The prophet stepped forth. Half aloud he spoke a few words—of the sacrifice—of redemption—of the Savior's mercy—of eternal splendor. Then he knelt beside the saint. They all knelt and all prayed silently; not a whisper was heard in the room. Ronchi opened the door and beckoned with his arm. The twelve men entered with their candles, knelt in the doorway and prayed. After a few minutes Ronchi sent them out again and beckoned others in. Then these knelt silently, prayed and went out again, relieved by new groups. In this way the whole village came, performed its devotions and prayed for the poor soul of the child who had sacrificed his body for their salvation.

Finally the prophet arose. The two girls came and helped the saint to arise. She laid her arms around their shoulders; thus she stood between them and quietly watched Venier and Alvassi take up the little coffin and carry it out. Frank Braun stepped out of the house; there the tailor arranged the procession. And the people of Val di Scodra looked strange enough in their white wrappings. They were all bareheaded and barefoot, but they all carried some weapon in their hand. Most of them had scourges and rods, but others carried spades, axes, or even long scythes and pitchforks. They looked as if they were faring forth to some wild war.

“Are they going to fight Satan with those things?” he thought. “That might become rather bloody.”

Ratti took the head of the procession with his drawn saber. The musicians with their instruments followed him—but no one either played or sang. It was silent all around, even the children were quiet. Two men carried the coffin behind the musicians, at the side of which walked six little white clad girls. Then the prophet followed and behind him the saint with her attendants. Then came the twelve lads, and finally the crowd led by Ronchi and Girolamo Scuro.

Frank Braun remained standing near the house and turned slowly toward the garden. He believed himself already hidden among the thick bushes, but suddenly he saw young Ulpo running back,

“Come with us, sir!” the fellow said.

He bit his lips, but there was nothing else for him to do but to follow quietly. They strode on rapidly until they caught up with the procession. Gloomily he walked among the candle bearers immediately behind the saint. The burying ground lay near the American’s garden, but the entrance was from the other side; so they had to pass through the village by the church. It was not on even ground, but descended in small terraces, on the lowest of which had been dug a small, open grave which was destined for Gino.

The people crowded around, but Ronchi waved them away. Obediently they climbed higher up in order to have a view from above. Pasquale jumped into the grave and the two bearers passed the light coffin to him. The prophet stepped forward and Ronchi bade them observe an even deeper silence. But before Pietro began the saint cried out aloud:

“Do you have you a cross? Do you have you a cross for Gino?”

They looked at each other and the tailor shook his head.

“No,” he said. “No one thought of it.”

The saint looked around and turned to the congregation.

“You shall make a cross,” she said, “a great cross—greater than any in the churchyard. As tall—as that one over there!”

And with her hand she pointed to the tall cross on the promontory.

“That is how tall you shall build it!”

Ronchi said, “Yes, sister, we will do so. We will build it tomorrow.”

But she cried out vehemently:

“Not tomorrow! You shall build it today! This very moment!”

Girolamo Scuro threw aside his linen garment. He seized Alvassi by the arm, who was standing near him:

“Come, we will build the cross.”

Ronchi followed them and yet a fourth man. They jumped over the low wall into the adjoining garden of the prophet. Frank Braun looked after

them. They went to the barn. There Pietro's wood was piled up against the rear wall. Scuro chose a long, square beam; they smoothed it and nailed a narrow board with strong hooks across it which they supported by means of four little diagonal beams. Ronchi went into the hall and returned with a piece of white pasteboard and a fragment of gilded paper. He cut out large letters, pasted them on the pasteboard and fastened the sign to the top of the cross.

The golden letters glittered in the sun: I. N. R. I.

In the meantime Ratti stationed the musicians as well as the twelve men near the grave. They began their song and the congregation joined in. They sang the fervent songs of the body of Christ. Then the prophet knelt in silent prayer, and they all followed his example. Scuro and the others returned, laid the cross on the ground, knelt and prayed with the rest. The prophet arose and blessed the grave silently. Then he took off his crown and threw three handfuls of earth upon the coffin. Venier took a shovel, filled it with earth and offered it to the saint; she put her hand in and kissed the earth.

"Gino is happy," she whispered. "He is with God forever."

She threw down the earth and fell sobbing upon her knees. The others approached as Ronchi beckoned to them. They filled up the grave and heaped a little mound over it. Again they sang a song; again the prophet spoke a soft prayer. Then they went. The women helped the saint up; she walked between them faltering. And the procession moved slowly under the burning sun back to the prophet's hall—the home of them all. When they reached the square before the church the saint stopped. She disengaged herself, drew herself up and cried aloud through the stillness:

"Where is the cross?"

A few people hurried back but she ascended the steps of the church. On the topmost step she turned and cried again:

"Rejoice and be glad! The Lamb has conquered! You shall dance and sing in the praises of the Lord! Let the music resound!"

The musicians mounted the steps. But no one lifted a limb in dance. What seemed to them most natural in the torch lit twilight of the hall became impossible in this bright sun drenched day.

The saint realized this.

“Fetch wine!” she cried. “Fetch the copper vessels. The prophet will give you to drink of the Blood of the Lamb. And sing! Sing!”

The song arose and filled the valley. Scuro ran away with several women; they brought the kettle.

“Brother,” he said to the prophet, “there is no more wine in the hall.”

The saint heard it.

“Run to my father’s house,” she cried.

Ratti said, “Your father is not there. He has gone to the city, sister.”

She pushed him back.

“Run!” she commanded. “Go to the cellar and open the door!”

They raced down to the lake; ahead of them all, in long leaps, went the huge farmhand. And they brought the wine—six great baskets full. The prophet stretched his arms to heaven.

“Holy Father, bless Elijah with Thy grace, Thy servant. Turn the wine into the blood of Thy Son who died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins!”

He passed his arms over the baskets and thus transformed the contents of all the bottles simultaneously. Then the tailor turned to the saint.

“Will you, too, bless the wine, Holy Sister?”

She extended her arms over the baskets and her lips murmured a prayer. Her golden crown sparkled in the sun—ah; she was indeed a high priestess! Ronchi trembled and stood as if charmed to the spot.

“Pour the wine!” the prophet commanded.

The tailor jumped up greedily, seized a bottle, knocked off its neck and filled a kettle. Quickly he carried the wine to his mouth and drank. His eyes were radiant with his fervent faith.

“Yes!” he cried. “Yes,—one can taste it well! Holy Sister, I taste the miracle of thy blessing; this is the Blood of Christ mixed with the Virgin’s milk.”

“Mary’s milk!” they cried. “Mary’s milk! The Savior’s Blood and the sacred milk of the Madonna!”

They filled the kettles and drank. And their Lord’s blood and His Mother’s milk gave them strength and made their eyes shine and turned the

radiant summer day into darkest night.

“Dance!” cried the saint. “Rejoice and sing!”

Now that the holy drink had opened the way to all their pious madness in the midst of this sober sunny day—the music had its effect too. They threw down their whips and weapons, joined hands and formed circles. The twelve men in the middle, around them a circle of women. And there was another circle and a fourth and a fifth—like the ripples that run circularly in quiet water, when one throws in a stone.

In the center stood the saint and the prophet, also Ronchi; around them swung the whirling dancers. The first, and the third, the fifth and seventh circles, consisting of men, danced toward the right—but the women danced toward the left. Then it began. They sang the Easter song, howled their hallelujahs at the top of their voices and repeated the words ten or twelve times at the end of each stanza.

*“The Savior has arisen,
Freed from death’s awful prison,
He as a Pascal Lamb
Did indeed suffer death
For my great need.
Hallelujah!*

*We have gained salvation;
Satan is bound and chained;
Death has no more sting,
The stone is gone, the grave empty.
Hallelujah!*

*The victor leads his host,
That was long imprisoned,
Free Into his Father’s kingdom,
That Adam lost for thee and me,*

Hallelujah!

*How fair his wounds do glow—
For me he suffered so!
How rings the angel's victory song
To Him who conquered death!
Hallelujah!*

It was a triumphant song of victory and the very chorus of the angels could not have resounded more loudly. Their powerful faith sounded through the valley of Scodra, as if it would tear down the cliffs and hurl them into the lake.

*My belief will not falter,
O comforting thought!
I will through His resurrection
Go straight from my grave to Him.
Hallelujah!*

*The night that covers me,
Till the heavens awaken me,
Is short. My Savior summons me
Into the Kingdom, where no one dies.
Hallelujah!*

*O sea of happiness!
My Savior has gone before me
To prepare a place for me there
O risen Lord, I follow Thee.
Hallelujah!*

“Hallelujah!” they cried. They were ready to follow at any moment. They sprang and tugged at each other in their circles, as if they would follow their Redeemer in a wild dance, enter into His Kingdom and blend their song of praise with that of His Heavenly hosts.

*And in that court above
Before Thy face of love,
I'll stand radiant from Your blood
And go to the marriage of the Lamb!
Hallelujah!*

Their enthusiasm rose, they sang this last stanza over and over. Hadn't they all drunk of the Blood of the Lamb? And hadn't their bodies been splashed with the blood which they themselves had shed for the Crucified One? How the Lord would rejoice when they came! How the Day of Judgment would become a festive day for all the seven heavens. And they rejoiced and leaped, gleaming white crowds in the glowing sun—

“Hallelujah! Hallelujah!”

Some fell down; they opened the circles to release them, but the circles closed again at once. They grew smaller and more contracted, but the singing did not abate its wild madness. Again and again Ronchi beckoned to the musicians and they redoubled their exertions whenever the song of the dancers seemed to grow fainter. One after another broke down in exhaustion, crept painfully to the church steps and moaned in hot distress.

But the prophet joined in the dance and his entrance gave new strength to the last circle which still swung around. He grasped the hands of Venier and the Cornaro woman and tore them around in that dizzying circle, and then he let them go and turned around himself like a mad blood—red cock. They all followed him.

“Hallelujah,” they cried. “Hallelujah.”

They danced and sang and fell down. They sprang up again and danced on anew. Suddenly, without any transition, the prophet stopped and

stood still in his mad whirl. He lifted his arms high, raised his head and stretched his scepter toward the sun.

“The heavens are open!” he cried. “Heaven has opened wide its gates. I see Christ sitting on the throne at the right of the Father.”

They all looked up into the white glow of the sun.

“I see him too!” cried Venier. “The Redeemer spreads out His arms and blesses us!”

The congregation knelt and it seemed as if a shiver of awe passed through the air and settled down on them.

“I feel the hand of God!” cried Maria Grazia.

But young Ulpo sprang up from the floor and bloody foam appeared on his lips. With swift steps he ran to the saint, knelt down, threw his head back and flung his arms into the air. Words formed themselves upon his lips, softly and hoarsely, grew louder and then burst out groaning and croaking. They all gathered around him.

Even Frank Braun came down the steps and approached him. He had stood up there and watched the dance. He was no longer anxious to flee since he had joined in the crowd. Even in the churchyard he had seen that it would be easy to escape; he only needed to turn around and go quietly on his way. No one bothered about him or even looked at him. And here in the square finally, when they began their wild dance, no eye seemed to rest on him for even a moment. So he remained in the calm assurance that he could go whenever he wanted to.

He looked curiously at Giovanni Ulpo; it was certain that the latter's state of possession had nothing visionary about it. But this attack was certainly not epileptic either. The young man did not speak; the confused words broke from him. They came separately, from deep down in his throat, accompanied by saliva and blood. And they were in some strange language. Frank Braun thought he heard a Greek word, then a Spanish one. But he could come to no conclusion, so rapidly and so disjointedly did the sounds burst from the distorted mouth. And then, suddenly, the lad's glance fell on the German. A sudden horror threw him back and a frightful abyss seemed to open before his eyes. And slowly, clearly and distinctly, in a voice that had nothing in common with his ordinary voice, Giovanni Ulpo spoke and pointed to him with lifted fingers.

“Et vidi bestiam—et apprehensa est bestia et cum ea pseudopropheta qui fecit signa coram ipsa; quibus reduxit eos qui acceperunt characterem bestiae et qui adoraverunt imaginem ejus. Vivi missi sunt hi duo in stagnum ignis ardentis sulphure. Et ceteri occisi sunt in gladio sedentis super equum, qui procedit de ore ipsius: et omnes aves saturatae sunt carnibus eorum.”

Frank Braun sought in his memory. He tore open all the compartments in feverish haste! Where, where did those words come from? And finally he found them and drew them forth into consciousness. He saw that no one understood the lad’s speech. That was his good luck! Otherwise they would have torn him to pieces! Nor did Ulpo himself understand his words; however he might feel their sense in his present condition.

No, he might feel quite secure. Softly he repeated the verses of Revelations:

“And I saw the beast—and the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that worked miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.”

But how did Giovanni Ulpo hit upon the words of the Vulgate? This peasant lad who had never heard a word except in the dialect of his native mountains? Except, perhaps, the swiftly mumbled Latin fragments of the priest at mass! How did he come upon them? Was it not again a reversal to some ancestral mental field—like everything that happened in this valley? Was he perhaps the great grandchild of some priest, even as Fiammetta Venier was the daughter of a border guard? And did this ancestor’s language speak from him?

What was it, after all, this “speaking in tongues?” Which vexed Paul, the apostle, so bitterly, for the speakers with tongues did not praise the Lord; they cursed him far more often. But though Paul pursued it zealously, it continued to flourish and survived for a thousand years. The Camisards in the Cévennes cultivated it assiduously and the Mormons made a sacred study of it. And in some Methodist churches one could hear it year in and year out. But what was it?

The saint brushed him with her garment. She passed him by, went to Ulpo and lifted him up:

“What have you seen, brother?” she asked him.

He stammered:

“The earth is red with blood. And the beast lives and is like the jaws of hell. And the jaws open and would devour us.”

Then the saint screamed:

“He is right! Giovanni Ulpo is right! Hell would devour us.”

They hurried to her, clung to her, as if she could protect them against all danger.

“Hell would devour us!” they cried.

The saint stretched out her arms.

“The prophet has seen the Heavens open and so has our sister, Matilda Venier. Christ has blessed us! The gates of the Kingdom are open and the Lord God awaits us. Prepare yourselves for the way of the Lord!”

She went backwards, climbed a few steps and placed both arms across the shoulders of her attendants.

“But Brother Ulpo, Giovanni Ulpo, the son of Vittorio, has seen hell open! Satan grudges us our victory and arms all his hosts to devour you. Blood covers the earth and our path can lead only through blood! Are you prepared to travel that path and fight against the power of Satan?”

“Yes,” they cried. “Yes! You shall lead us!”

They thronged up the steps and seized their weapons again, ready to hurl themselves against the wild foe that would attack them at any moment.

The saint cried out, “Do not despair, my brothers and sisters! Christ is the Redeemer and under His banner you must conquer! The devil spews forth his hellish fire against us, thrusts at us with his horns, grasps out after us with his long claws! Do not let him capture you! Fight against his invisible might! He is around us everywhere: beat him, tread upon him, and stab him! Defend yourselves to the last drop of your blood!”

Then the Venier woman cried, “I see Satan, the betrayer, the murderer of souls! There he is, there he stands and stretches out his arms after me!”

She raised her whip and lashed wildly out into the air. They all hurried up. They beat against the church wall with their pointed hooks, and lashed the earth with scourges, cudgels and rods. They lifted their hammers and

axes, jabbed around with spades and long pitchforks. Ratti belabored the wooden church door with his saber; Alvassi threw his sickle high into the air. The long scythes gleamed in the sun, the rakes and spades whirled over their heads.

“Strike out!” they cried. “Give up your lives for Christ! ——Do you not see him there, Beelzebub, the murderer? Have at him! At him!—It is the wrath of God! Lord, have mercy upon us!—Hell has broken loose! Strike out!”

The prophet cried, “Whoever loses his life in Christ will gain it, whoever would keep it will lose it! Strike out! In this way souls are saved and Satan is conquered!”

They fought in the hot sun. Dirty sweat broke from their pores and was mixed with the blood that oozed out of their reopened wounds. But they did not draw back or falter; their weapons raged tirelessly.

The saint called to her women, “You are the merciful sisters! Go and refresh the fighters of the Lord!”

She had the kettles filled, blessed them and the prophet blessed them. And Linda and Carmelina picked them up and Maria Grazia and the little Silvia, Ronchi’s daughter. They ran among the fighters and refreshed their parched lips with the Savior’s blood. Thus the mad fight raged on. They knocked in the strong wall of the church and the wooden door crashed in pieces.

“He is in the church!” howled the smith. “Satan hides himself in the house of God!”

They stormed in, pulled down the altar cloths, tore down the pictures and trod them into tatters under foot. They broke whatever they could lay their hands on and attacked the crossbeams with powerful axes. The beams burst with a crash; the old roof rattled down and buried five or six of the fighters of God. Pasquale lay there with broken legs, but his arms swung the ax and hewed about him with undiminished strength.

“Strike out! Slay the murderer of souls! Give up your lives for Christ!”

Scuro hurried up. He came from the hall and carried four burning pitch torches in his hands. And he hurled them into the ruined church in a high semi-circle.

“We’ll smoke him out, the dog of Satan.”

Immediately the dry, decaying wood caught fire, blazed up like tinder and filled the church with a sea of smoke and flames. They hurried out, saving themselves as best they could and, once without, raged anew against the walls. The saint stepped into the middle of the square, and, at a gesture from her, Ratti assembled the musicians.

“Lord God,” they played—triangle, tambourine and concertina.

She summoned them all to her.

“You have overcome!” she cried. “Brothers, sisters, you have overcome!”

She listened, and then continued in a louder voice:

“Do you hear? Do you hear? The heavenly choirs are playing above!”

Again she stopped and listened, and in fanatical jubilation she screamed:

“And there, there in the church! Satan is dying—do you not hear him groaning and moaning?”

They all listened intently; and really a pitiful moaning came from the burning church.

“Praise be to Jesus Christ!” they roared. “Praise be to the Lord! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!”

And they sang:

*“Holy, Lord God Sabbaoth!
Holy, Lord of Victory,
Mighty helper in our need,
Heaven, Earth, Air and Sea
Are filled with Thy great glory,
Your Kingdom is everywhere!”*

Frank Braun was still standing near the steps of the church; breathlessly he listened to the sounds of torment that came from within. They seemed to come from four or five places—a groan here, and a

desperate moaning over there. Then, from the left, a few words came to him.

“Merciful God—”

He understood that much, and again:

“Christ, Christ, do not forsake me!”

“Good heavens,” he murmured. “It’s young Ulpo’s voice! They forgot him and he’s burning up alive!”

Without stopping to think he leaped up the steps, made his way through the door and across the flaming beams. But he could make no headway, and saw nothing for the thick, biting smoke that beat into his eyes. Then a long board broke from the roof, and fell upon his shoulder with such force that he sank upon his knees. The walls flared up and their collapse threatened at any moment. He had to flee. The moaning grew feebler and feebler. Once more the man cried out. Then he fell silent.

“Now he has smothered to death!” the German whispered.

And outside those wild creatures sang the last stanza of the Te Daum Laudamus. The prophet spoke a prayer of thanks, and upon his knees with his congregation he praised the Lord. The saint said:

“Thank the Lord! Praise Him and sing His praise! You will enter into His Kingdom when the time is fulfilled. The Savior himself has revealed to me what must come to pass.”

They listened intently.

The prophet asked, “What is it, Holy Sister?”

And she said, “Kiss one another, O brothers and sisters, for the time has come in which the great sacrifice must be made.”

And she approached the prophet, laid her hands on his shoulders and kissed him on both cheeks. Then she kissed Ronchi, Ratti and all her women. Scuro approached too; she hesitated for a second but she raised both her arms:

“Kiss me, brother.”

They all kissed one another; they all went to the saint, and to the prophet. They saluted one another:

“Kiss me, sister,” or “Welcome, brother, in the name of the Lord.”

Each one kissed the saint and to each she gave her forehead and her cheeks. Then suddenly she tore herself away from these pious caresses.

“Hurry, hurry,” she cried, “that the sign may be fulfilled!”

But again she embraced her women, kissed them and moistened their cheeks with her warm tears.

“Say farewell to me! Say farewell!”

It seemed as if she could scarcely bear to part from Carmelina and Linda Vuoto. No longer ago than yesterday her cruel scourge had beaten and lacerated the bodies of the girls; now she lay in their arms, moved and tender, smiling amid her tears.

“Say farewell!” she said. “It must be; Christ commands it.”

She gave them her hands which the women covered with kisses. She drew herself up, raised her head and tossed back her hair.

“Where is the cross?” she asked. “Bring the cross here.”

Scuro dragged it up.

“Here, Holy Sister.”

The saint approached, put her hands on the crossbeam and caressed it gently.

“Hear me, sisters and brothers; this is what Christ has revealed to me: he wishes that I die for you. That is the pledge which the Lord God demands for the salvation of your souls, the sacrifice of my life!”

And softly, almost tenderly, she continued, “You must crucify me!”

They stood around her, rigid and silent, with wide-open mouths. No one spoke; even the prophet did not move his lips. But the saint did not falter.

“Raise your eyes!” she cried. “Look over there!”

She extended her arms and all eyes, following her gesture, beheld the crosses on the promontory.

“Brothers! Sisters! Do you see the three crosses? Jesus Christ is there between the two thieves. There you shall erect a fourth cross—this one. And I will hang upon it and sacrifice my body for the forgiveness of your sins and my own! So has the Lord God decreed!”

They were still silent, no one ventured a word. And it seemed as if in these heads which were accustomed to accepting every suggestion without questioning or opposition something resisted this last monstrosity.

“Will you do it?”

They did not answer.

“Are you cowardly? Would you resist the will of the Lord and kick against the pricks? Would you have me swing the hammer myself with which to nail me to the wood?”

Firmly she grasped the hand of the farmhand.

“Girolamo Scuro— you shall do it!”

“Holy Sister—” the giant stammered, “Holy Sister—”

She cried out: “You shall do it, you shall do it! Hell will devour you if you refuse. You must do it, Girolamo!”

And the red-goitered man said—and his voice sounded thin and light as that of a boy.

“Yes, Holy Mistress!”

“I knew it well,” she said softly, “I knew it well. Your hand will fasten me to the cross—your hand!”

She seized the large, horrible hand, bowed down and kissed it humbly. And slowly, reflectively and doubtingly, she continued:

“And yet—I am not fated to die—by this hand.”

It was as if she were talking to something within her, asking and again answering an inner voice. But she tore herself from her own thoughts.

“As the Lord Jesus Christ wills it—into His hands I commend my body. Let it happen according to His will.”

She turned to the prophet:

“Brother, lead us up to the promontory! In order that the will of the Lord be fulfilled!”

Then she went back to her women and quietly watched the prophet arranging the procession with Ronchi and Ratti. Frank Braun heard every word that she spoke. He stood still on the steps, almost unable to move a limb.

“She will sacrifice herself,” he whispered. “She will hang on the cross to redeem the souls of her brothers.”

She—Teresa Raimondi—his beloved. Whom he had kissed with passionate, thirsty lips, who had lain in his arms through many an hour of the night— She would hang—up there—on the cross—He could not understand it, he passed his hand over his eyes. But he was not dreaming—even now they were ordering the procession: Scuro and Venier lifted the mighty cross. He was terror stricken and something throttled his throat. He gasped for breath and clenched his fists—so this was the end of the game? And he was helpless, powerless, a miserable, wretched worm!

But his creatures, his puppets, lived and grew to gigantic stature and strode across him and thrust into the very skies—

“Away,” he murmured, “away!”

It was unendurable—he must flee before the curtain rose on this last, most frightful scene. He pulled himself together. He went straight ahead, staggering, toward the houses. He looked around him—up the lane, along the gardens, toward the burying ground. Here would be the best place. Behind the bushes he was safe. He went up the street, keeping close to the houses. He could still be seen, so he walked slowly to attract no attention. But involuntarily his pace became hurried, quicker and quicker. Finally he ran. Now he was among the green willow bushes. Then he heard a loud cry.

“Hold him! Seize the stranger!”

It was Teresa’s voice—and this voice—her voice—held him fast to the spot in the midst of his running. He stood as if rooted to the ground; he could not move his feet.

“Seize the stranger!” she had said.

The stranger—that’s who he was—the stranger! Teresa herself had called him that. Six men ran up to him and he did not move. Girolamo Scuro struck his shoulder, grasped his coat and swung him around. He snorted and the red goiter expanded like a repulsive, limbless polypus. Frank Braun did not resist, however, and quietly permitted himself to be led to the saint. She looked at him and his eyes tried to read that look. But there was nothing in it that had the least thing in common with anything in the past.

“Guard him,” she said quietly. “It is God’s will that he be present when I die.”

Then a hot rage was mixed with his wretched fear. A curse and a wild blasphemy raced in his blood.

“It is God’s will,” he repeated. “And—”

But he spoke no further and his teeth were clenched in powerless rage. Then, suddenly, his heated brain bore a new thought. He stood still, did not move, and closed his eyes to calm his nerves. And he succeeded. He breathed more freely, his features brightened and a relieved smile played about his lips. Oh, that was the easy and yet the great salvation! Why hadn’t he thought of it at once? He could have prevented it all—Gino’s pitiful death and Giovanni’s and that of the others who burned to death in the ruins of the church! Too late for them, too late! And yet soon enough for Teresa! Swiftly he approached her. He grasped her left hand and sought the cushion of her thumb with his fingers. That was the place! The little hypnotically sensitive spot that had subjected her will to his. He pressed it vigorously—she did not withdraw her hand. Quietly and in astonishment she looked at him.

“What do you want?” she asked.

A fever seized him. “I—I—” he stammered.

Perhaps he was mistaken. Was it the other hand? He grasped her right hand and pressed the same place. But she did not lower her eyes.

“What do you want?” she repeated gently.

A mist came over his eyes through which he saw a red glare. His power had vanished—was obliterated, broken! He stood poverty stricken and wretched before her—she was free, and the last uniting shred between them was torn. He felt it to be a last and crying treachery.

“Go your way to hell then!” he whispered hoarsely.

Alvassi heavily seized his right arm, Cornaro his left. One held a powerful scourge, the other a mighty pitchfork with long, iron spikes. The young men surrounded him, each carrying a weapon in one hand and a burning candle in the other. Thus they joined the procession—





Chapter Fourteen

"The Crucifix is my love."

-St. Ignatius



Ronchi ordered the procession. Meanwhile the prophet caused the copper vessels to be filled with wine and transformed it. Ratti marched with the musicians at the head of the procession, and behind them paced old Ulpo and the other aged men and women. The prophet followed with four other men who carried scourges, then Girolamo Scuro and Venier, who bore the heavy cross on their shoulders, and the saint walked behind the cross, surrounded by her women. Then came Ronchi himself, swinging his whip high through the air. The smith Alvassi and Cornaro conducted the stranger and behind them strode the lads with their candles. The people followed in a dense crowd.

To the right and to the left, however, on both sides of the procession, ten girls and ten boys hurried up and down; they carried the kettles and gave them to any that wanted to be refreshed by the blood of the Lord. In this manner they proceeded along the broad road which first led down to the lake and then rose slowly to the promontory of the crosses.

Ronchi did not turn his face away from the saint; his black eyes gleamed in pious love and ardent rapture. And suddenly, as the music fell silent, he intoned in an unnaturally loud voice the great litany which is called the Lauretanian. He called upon the Lord God, the Father in Heaven, upon His Son, the Redeemer of the World, the Holy Ghost and the Trinity. But his voice rose in fanatical transports of love when he reached the invocations to the Madonna.

“Holy Mary pray for us! Holy Mother of God—Holy Virgin of all Virgins—Mother of Christ—Mother of divine grace—Thou purest Mother—Thou most virginal Mother—Thou immaculate Mother—Thou sweet Mother—Thou Mother of the Creator—Thou Mother of the Redeemer—Thou wisest Virgin—Thou revered Virgin—Thou laudable Virgin—Thou

gracious Virgin—Thou faithful Virgin—Thou mirror of righteousness—
Thou seat of wisdom, Pray for us.”

The congregation joined in and from all throats rang out, after each invocation:

“Pray for us!”

First it sounded softly, almost like a whisper, and then it took on volume and grew louder and more insistent, like a just demand that is conscious of certain fulfillment.

“Thou source of our salvation—Pray for us! Thou reverend vessel—
Pray for us! Thou excellent vessel of devotion—Pray for us! Thou rose of
the spirit—Pray for us! Thou tower of David! Pray for us!”

But Ronchi’s eyes were not raised above to where the Madonna sat enthroned in the blue heavens. They rested only upon the saint. And it seemed as if the invocations were meant for her and for her alone. She it was, she alone, whom he praised.

“Thou tower of ivory—Thou golden house—Thou Ark of the
Covenant—Thou gate of heaven—Thou morning star—Thou morning
star!” he cried out to her jubilantly. “Thou morning star!”

And the congregation joined in:

“Pray for us—Pray for us. Thou salvation of the sick—Thou refuge of
sinners—Thou consoler of the afflicted—Thou helper of Christians—Thou
queen of the angels—”

He ran to her, threw himself on the ground and kissed the hem of her garment.

“Thou queen of the angels!” he stammered.

“Thou queen of the patriarchs—Thou queen of the prophets—Thou
queen of the apostles—Thou queen of the martyrs—Thou queen of the
confessors—Thou queen of the virgins—“

“Pray for us!” the people cried.

And it seemed as if the spirit of worship that animated Ronchi extended itself and took possession of them all. Those behind her crowded closer; those who preceded her turned around to see her. But her women gathered close around her, happy if they might touch an edge of her garment. They cried out aloud to her and all joined in:

“Thou queen of the holy rosary, pray for us! O Thou Lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us!”

They repeated the Lord’s Prayer and the Hail Mary, and it was the saint to whom they prayed. She, who was now going in unto the Father, was to be the messenger of their pious wishes. She was to be their mediatrix at the throne of God. She was the bride of the Redeemer.

She remained standing. The prophet turned to the saint and said the Salve Regina.

“Hail, O Queen, Mother of Mercies, the sweetness of life and our hope, hail! To Thee we cry, miserable children of Eve, to Thee we sigh, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Hail, O Mother, our mediatrix, turn thy merciful eyes unto us in our wretchedness, show us to Jesus, the blessed fruit of thy womb, O gracious, mild, sweet Virgin Mary!”

They spoke five Paternosters and five Ave Marias; then the prophet blessed them. And they proceeded up the hill of Calvary. To the right, in the mountain wall, was the picture of the first station of the cross; Ronchi raised his hand and they halted.

The prophet said:

“We adore Thee, Lord Jesus Christ, and praise Thee!”

And they responded:

“For through Thy holy cross didst Thou redeem the world.”

Frank Braun looked upon the picture. It showed Christ before Pilate. The proconsul sat on his chair, he had just pronounced judgment. Then the men-at-arms seized the Nazarene, pressed the crown of thorns upon his head and scourged him. The saint knelt and prayed. Then she arose with a quiet and resigned smile.

“Loosen my garment,” she commanded her women. “And you, brother Ronchi, fetch a crown of thorns.”

The tailor thought for a moment, and then he departed with swift steps. The women went hesitatingly to their work; slowly they loosened her garments at her shoulders so that her neck was free. Ronchi returned and brought a piece of barbed wire. He cut off a thorny twig and wound it around the twisted wire. He pricked himself and his finger bled.

“Give it to me, brother!” said the saint.

She took off the golden cross and the bloody stigmata gleamed on her forehead. She kissed the crown of thorns and set it firmly on her head.

“It is the crown of the Lord!” she said. “It hurts, but these are the sweet pains of the Redeemer!”

Then she pointed to the picture.

“Behold, my brothers, how Christ suffered under the hands of the Jews. This I must now suffer. Take your scourges and scourge me!”

They hesitated again and she had to repeat her command. But the blows were feeble and hesitant.

“You must strike me even as they struck Christ,” she said. “May God strengthen your arms!”

And they obeyed and struck her—but she did not complain. She smiled quietly and said:

“They are the pains of the Redeemer.”

Then she turned to the prophet.

“Spit upon me,” she begged. “Even as the Jews spat upon the Savior.”

The prophet answered:

“Do not demand that, sister! How dare I spit upon your holy face?”

But she insisted.

“You must do it,” she said. “You must all do it in order that the will of the Lord be fulfilled. Girolamo and Scuro—spit upon me.”

The man spat and his black, horrible spittle clung to her sweet cheek. She thanked him humbly; then she turned to Carmelina:

“Spit upon me!”

But the girl cried out and sank down sobbing and kissed her naked, bloody feet. The saint caressed the girl and raised her up.

“Dear sister, you must do it; the Lord demands it.”

The poor girl threw herself into her arms and obeyed. But it was more of a kiss. They all approached and all spat upon her face. And the saint thanked each one humbly.

“Let us proceed farther,” she said.

They came to the second station where the picture showed Christ taking up the cross.

“We pray unto Thee, Lord Jesus Christ, and praise Thee!” said the prophet.

And the congregation responded:

“For by Thy holy cross didst Thou redeem the world.”

The saint turned to Scuro and Venier.

“Lay down the cross,” she commanded.

She stretched out both her arms toward it and lifted it.

“You will not be able to carry it, Holy Sister,” said Ronchi.

She answered:

“I must carry it. Did not the Lord also carry His cross?”

She waved away those who would help her. She took the heavy wood and laid it across her bleeding shoulder. Her back bent and the sharp edge pressed deeply into her flesh.

“Beat me,” she demanded. “Drive me on, as the soldiers drove the Lord to Golgotha.”

They obeyed and whipped her; step by step she stumbled under the frightful load. Then, at the third station, she broke down—as Christ did in the picture. She lay there fainting while the congregation spoke prayers. She arose with the help of her women, took up the cross anew and dragged it on, sighing and moaning under the strokes of the scourges.

At the fourth station she stopped again and knelt down and laid the cross on the earth. With eyes full of tears she saw how the Savior, bending under the burden of the cross, meets His sad Mother.

“Lord, Father in heaven, increase my strength!” she prayed. And they proceeded to the fifth picture. Her shoulders seemed to be laid open, so deeply had the sharp wood cut into the flesh. And only the scourging drove her on; she dragged herself wearily, stopping every moment, like an animal led to slaughter. The picture showed how the soldiers seized Simon of Cyrene and forced him to help the exhausted Savior drag the cross. Scuro leaped forward, grasped the cross and loaded the lower part of his broad shoulders. Thus he went behind the saint and vigorously helped her bear the cross which, nevertheless, still burdened her grievously. They came to the

sixth station, which represented Veronica kneeling before the Lord and handing Him her handkerchief to wipe away the sweat and blood. The prophet spoke a prayer and the congregation responded at each picture.

“Give me a cloth,” the saint said to her women.

Then Linda Vuoto tore off a piece of the linen that wrapped her and gave it to the saint. The latter pressed her face into it as Jesus did in the picture and handed it back to the girl.

“Take it, dearest sister,” she said, “and keep it well in memory of me.”

They proceeded and the people thrust and tugged her forward, just as she commanded. The mighty cross pressed her heavily, despite Scuro’s help; she stumbled and fell down again, as the Savior did in the picture at the seventh station. But she arose quickly and went farther on the bitter way to the cross.

At the eighth picture she showed the people how Jesus comforted the weeping daughters of Jerusalem. And she beckoned her women and kissed their weeping eyes and said:

“Weep not for me! I go to prepare a place for you with the Bridegroom. And in a little while you will be with me in the bosom of the Lord.”

The saint’s steps grew weaker and weaker, and her poor body was bent lower under the weight of the cross. And as Jesus of Nazareth fell for a third time upon his path of suffering, so she fell too—under the picture at the ninth station. She arose and dragged herself on, painfully gasping, to the tenth picture, where Jesus was robbed of His garments and refused the gall which the soldiers offered Him.

The saint regarded the picture with a low moan; but her tears flowed for the sufferings of the Savior and not for her own. Then she turned to the congregation.

“Do your duty,” she said resignedly. “Do as the soldiers did.”

The women loosened the robe from her loins and from her shoulders and gently pulled off the garment which adhered with blood to the skin. They surrounded her; stripped her and wound a linen cloth around her middle which they gathered high and fastened with a rope. Thus she stood, naked from the knees down and from the waist up. Her soft flesh gleamed in the sun.

“Rend my garment,” she said, “and throw lots for it!”

Ronchi rent it with a sharp knife. He threw the rags into a copper kettle and let them all approach. Each drew one out with closed eyes. They pressed them to their lips. And those whose rag held a drop of blood rejoiced loudly. And they went farther up the hill of Calvary. Then Scuro carried the cross together with Venier, and the saint went by their side. They came to the eleventh picture.

“Behold,” she said, “how they nailed Jesus to the cross. And mark it well.”

They knelt and prayed and proceeded to the twelfth station, the picture of the death on the cross. The saint regarded it long, as if she would impress upon herself deeply what she must do in her heavy hour.

The prophet spoke again:

“We adore Thee, Lord Jesus Christ, and praise Thee!”

And the congregation answered:

“For by Thy holy cross didst Thou redeem the world.”

The saint said, “He was obedient even unto death.”

And they said, “Yes, even unto death on the cross.”

At the thirteenth picture, which shows the removal from the cross, the prophet said, “Holy Sister, we promise to do even as the friends of Christ did—Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea and Mary Magdalene.”

Carmelina pressed close to her:

“And your head shall rest in my lap.”

The saint said, “I thank you, dear sisters and brothers. Do everything as the Lord commands.”

They came to the last station where the picture showed the burial.

And she said, “Thus will it come to pass!”

The prophet repeated the prayer to the five sacred wounds of Jesus, and they went farther the last little piece of the way—up to Golgotha. The saint knelt before the image of the Son of Man. Then she arose and pointed to a spot before the Savior’s cross.

“Set it up here!” she commanded.

Ratti and five young men seized a shovel and hoes. They worked quickly and the hole became deeper and deeper. They threw the earth aside and lifted out the heavy stones with their hands.

“Put the cross in!” the saint commanded.

Scuro and Venier obeyed. Then she kissed her women. She lay down on the cross, folded her feet and stretched her arms far out upon the crossbeam. Scuro looked at her, and then he examined the picture of Christ.

“We can’t nail her feet,” he said.

Cornaro said, “We ought to bind her. That is better.

But the saint looked at him:

“Would you execute me like the robbers? Make a support for my feet!”

Scuro took his axe and hewed a piece from the crossbeam which extended too far on each side. He carved it with his eye on the image of Christ as if to get the right measure. Then he nailed the narrow board to the trunk of the cross under her feet.

“Is this right, Holy Sister?” he asked.

Lightly she propped her feet against it and nodded.

“Yes,” she said. “I am resting softly in the Bridegroom’s arms.”

She closed her eyes and folded her hands in prayer. And the peasants dug the hole. A lad jumped in and loosened the stones with a pick and handed them up. When the hole was deep enough, they built a narrow shaft of crude masonry to give the cross support. Frank Braun still stood close by them; Cornaro and ugly Alvassi still held him fast. There was no possibility of escape; the people stood densely crowded on the broad platform and far down along the path of the cross—they spoke the litany of the bitter Sorrows of Jesus; the prophet cried upon the Son of God and the congregation joined in:

“Have mercy upon us! Have mercy upon us!”

His ear heard the hoarse invocations, caught them up and cried them into his brain:

“Jesus, bathed in bloody sweat—Jesus,—spat upon—Jesus, scourged with rods—Jesus, crowned with thorns—Jesus, led like a lamb to the slaughter—Jesus, cruelly robbed of His garments—

Ah, it was the saint, it was Teresa! She was the Son even as she was the Mother! And his lips formed the words which came from the mouths of all:

“Have mercy upon us!”

He felt as if he were shriveling up, as if he were getting smaller and shorter. But the saint developed into the infinite. He turned his eyes away from that calm face which smiled toward death as toward a gentle kiss. He could have hidden himself in the hole which the lads were digging. He could not even cry out. He felt as if a cry would liberate him—but his lips stuck together.

He closed his eyes; with a wild and terrible exertion he forced his thoughts to leave this platform, to quench this terrible flame of emotion in cool weighing and reflection. It was a last desperate effort of his civilized self, a terrible struggle for a last possibility of raising himself above all that was taking place, of attaining the stature of a mere cool observer of the wild tragedy of this madwoman. He clenched his fists tightly and bit his tongue. The veins in his temples were near bursting. He struggled. Could he not succeed? What was it? Could he no longer bear to see a human being put to death? It was not the first time! He recalled that there was a time in his life when he had never missed an opportunity to see such a spectacle, and ran to an execution as if it were a bullfight.

He recalled each occasion in his mind. He had seen the guillotine work four times. And he had been present when the executioner had beheaded Josefa Kreuter. He had seen more than one swing from the gallows and knew how the garrote worked and the big chair in Sing Sing. And he had joked about it! And what was left in the end? Not much more than a slightly bad taste on the tongue—a bitter-sweet taste of blood.

He had seen how they dragged Joe Whiting to the stake. The Negro scoundrel who had violated and killed an alderman's wife. The lynchers had fetched him from prison and led him in the torch lit night with crying and howling under an ash tree in the field. It was a genuine picture of such a Southern scene—three thousand black scamps and a handful of men on horses. They built the wooden pile, drenched it with coal oil and put the Negro on it. They fastened a noose around his neck and slung the rope over a branch. The sheriff spoke a few words and the alderman put the torch to the wood. It flamed high in a moment but at the same time thirty reports

rang out and thirty good Winchester bullets riddled the black body. It was a farce! It only looked cruel. It was a fantastic comedy calculated to impress the Negroes. Now they would keep the peace for a few years and the wives and daughters of white men could breathe more freely.

All that was not so bad. The first time—certainly, the first time it was quite exciting. Just as a boy's heart beats the first time he goes swimming, or a student's when facing his opponent, each with his foil. But after a while the essentials were obliterated and only the details, the technique, remained interesting. Just like at a bullfight when it became the main point of interest that the Espada should thrust his sword at the first blow deep between the shoulders of the animal, so that it would rise like a cross between the horns; as, at a cockfight, when one ended up merely observing whether the cock aimed well at the eyes of its opponent—just so at an execution when the interest was finally centered upon the executioner's skill, and this was good if it were swift and clever. This was the positive element and the emotions were submerged.

But here they stepped forth in sultry terror and subtle oppressions and throttled him. And why?—was there nothing that could divert him? He looked for Girolamo Scuro. He was nailing the support for her feet fast to the Cross and measuring it by the one in the picture—just like the carpenter did in his workshop. Or Ratti and his men who dug the hole? No, they were not executioners—not one of them.

None had his own will; they were tools, nothing else. They were axes, ropes, guillotines— but not executioners. They obeyed the commands of the saint. The executioner did not obey. He was a free man who attended to his business. He took his wage and, in return, obligated himself to kill the murderer. It was his strong will to kill him. But none of these people wanted to kill the saint. Each, on the contrary, would gladly have given his own life to save her.

Only her will demanded the execution: therefore she was the executioner, she alone. And her work was awkward and slow—she was a wretched executioner. But good or bad, how could this executioner withdraw the attention to herself—from the victim—this executioner who was herself the victim? He grasped his head with both hands; his brain seemed to swell and to press toward all sides as if to burst his skull. No, no,

it was not possible to liberate himself—he was a part, some part of this bestial crowd.

The saint raised her eyes.

“Are you done?” she asked softly.

Ratti nodded:

“Yes, Holy Sister.”

She smiled gently. “Then begin.”

She beckoned to Scuro.

“How shall I begin?” he asked.

She said, “Fasten my feet to the wood.”

The man knelt down, he selected a nail that was very long and had a large head and tested its point with his teeth.

“Shall I drive it into the wounds?” he asked.

“Yes,” said the saint, “that is the place which the Lord himself has designated!”

He placed the nail and lifted the hammer. But he let it drop again for his arm trembled.

“What are you waiting for?” asked the saint.

He stammered:

“Holy Mistress”

She said, “Give him a drink of the Blood of the Lord!”

They handed him a vessel and he emptied it at one avid draught.

“Do you feel strong enough, Brother Girolamo?”

On his knee he slid to where her head lay.

“Mistress, Holy Sister, will you forgive me?”

She nodded:

“Brother, what you are to do is the will of God. It is a sacrifice that He demands of you—so that you may attain the forgiveness of your sins!”

He drank once more, and then kissed the holy wounds upon her feet. He sighed heavily and set the nail. He raised the hammer and struck—Frank Braun heard the hammer fall. Scuro’s back hid the feet of the saint from

him, but he saw her face. She smiled humbly and her lips moved softly. Nevertheless she was feeling the pain: her hands clutched the wood convulsively and her fingernails dug themselves into it—they all knelt and prayed and dared not look up. And only the clear blows of the hammer screamed through the air.

Girolamo Scuro arose and with a white cloth wiped the dirty sweat from his forehead.

“It is done,” he croaked.

She thanked him. “Now the left hand,” she commanded.

He obeyed. Frank Braun saw how he pressed the hammer upon the stigmata, drove it through with one powerful blow and fastened it to the wood.

“The right hand,” she said.

The man hesitated.

“Holy Sister—it isn’t fast enough yet—it might tear off—”

Frank Braun writhed and a thick lump rose high in his throat. Oh, this was the most unspeakable thought of all: her hand might rip off, she might fall over forward and hang only by her bleeding feet—but the saint smiled:

“Have no care, brother, but do as I bid you!”

He went to her other side, knelt down and grasped her hand. He set the nail in the wound and swung the hammer.

She said, “Brother, I thank you. Now give the hammer to the prophet.

“Scuro obeyed. The prophet took the hammer.

“What am I to do?” he asked.

“Strike a blow on the nail in my left hand!”

He knelt and did as she demanded.

“Now you, brother Ronchi.”

And Ronchi gave a blow. And then she called old Ulpo.

Frank Braun thought:

“It is well so. Now you won’t be torn off.”

She called to her women.

“Linda Vuoto, take the hammer.”

The girl lifted it but it slipped from her hand:

“Holy Sister, I cannot do it!”

“You must do it, you must all do it. God wills it. Strike, and give the hammer to Carmelina.”

Each took the hammer. Carmelina used it lightly; it scarcely touched the nail. But Matilda Venier evidently felt that here was a good work that would open the gate of heaven to her.

And she cried:

“Save us, O Lamb of God, who barest the sins of the world!”

And she raised her arm and struck so vigorously that the nail bent.

The saint asked, “Has each given a stroke?”

And Ronchi said, “Yes, Holy Sister.”

“Then set the cross up!”

Scuro and Cornaro raised the cross from behind and five others helped them. They carried it carefully to the hole and lowered it so that its end touched the mouth of the cavity. Then they hesitated as if awaiting a new command from the saint.

“Set it up!” she repeated.

Ratti and Alvassi pressed the end into the hole; the others lifted the cross. Then the crown of thorns slipped from her head. “Stop!” cried the prophet. He lifted the crown and replaced it on her forehead.

“Press it more firmly—more firmly!” said the saint. “I dare not lose the Redeemer’s crown. With it I shall arise in three days and enter into the Kingdom of the Lord.”

The prophet did as she bade him, pressed firmly upon the thorns, and lifted her head a little so that the crown was wedged between it and the cross. They lifted the cross again until its position was vertical. They held it over the hole and lowered it slowly, inch by inch, so that it might not fall. They drove wooden wedges between the trunk and the shaft in order to support it, rolled up heavy stones and filled in the interstices with earth. And the cross stood fast and projected high above that of the Son of Man and above those of the thieves. They looked up, they thronged and crowded and a deep unrest impelled them. The prophet approached the cross:

“Holy Sister, what are we to do?”

Her lips whispered, “Pray!”

They all knelt; the prophet repeated the Good Friday prayer.

Frank Braun raised his eyes. She was beautiful—she had never been so beautiful. Her head inclined toward her left shoulder, her long, black locks fell down at both sides. The crown of thorns adorned her forehead and threw coral drops upon it. Her white breasts, drawn up by extended arms, gleamed in the sun like ripe fruits upon a golden salver. The cloth around her middle lay in ample folds, as in one of Cranach’s pictures, and left her thighs free and showed her nobly beautiful legs. The wounds in her hands and feet were tearing and poured out thin trickles of her red blood.

He thought:

“How long will she have to hang this way until death sets her free? Jesus of Nazareth hung for six hours. But the thieves at his side were still alive and their legs had to be broken when the sun sank and the Sabbath approached. Would they have to break Teresa’s legs, too? But the quiet smile died upon her lips; her features grew hard and rigid. One small drop of blood issued from her mouth and fell.

“If only she were dead!” he whispered.

She did not stir; she hung silent and motionless upon the cross. Then a trembling went through the muscles of her arms and raced convulsively through her body which was lifted and then fell back against the wood. Her mouth fell open; her chin hung low upon her breast. The minutes passed—or were they hours? Ah—they were eternities for him. His eyes clung to her face; breathlessly he watched for the slightest motion.

“She speaks!” he whispered.

The prophet drew himself up.

“Holy Sister, what are you saying to us?”

Softly, almost inaudibly, the Savior’s words came from her lips:

“I thirst.”

“Give her something to drink!” he cried. “Quickly, quickly!”

Tullio Tramonte seized a kettle; Scuro went up to the cross and put his two arms around it.

“Climb on my back!”

Tullio climbed up and stood on the giant’s shoulders. They gave him the kettle and he raised it up. But his arm was not long enough; it reached scarcely half the way. Ronchi tore a piece from his linen cloth, rolled it up and dipped it into the wine. Then he stuck it on Ratti’s saber, slowly and carefully, so that it might keep the moisture. He gave the saber to the lad:

“Put the cloth to her lips, brother!”

Tullio raised the saber high and pressed the cloth to her open mouth. She seized it with her teeth and sucked the drops greedily.

“She drinks, the saint drinks,” the prophet whispered.

They all looked up. Scuro loosened his left arm and stepped to one side in order to be able to see; he pushed against a loose stone and stumbled a little. He did not fall but supported himself against the cross. But Tullio Tramonte, standing without support, lost his equilibrium and fell down. Involuntarily he grasped for something and seized the cloth around the saint’s middle. The rope gave way and was loosened and Tullio fell. Alvassi caught him in his arms.

Frank Braun gave a soft cry. He had feared for a moment that the lad would pull down the crucified saint with him. But he barely touched her—and only tore the white cloth from her body. Only the cloth—she was still hanging on the cross—and he saw how her body was rounded. He stared at her—she was pregnant. She carried a child in her womb. A child—His child! His child! He cried out. He thrust back those who stood before him and made his way to the cross.

“Teresa!” he cried. “Teresa!”

But she gave no answer. Her eyes were closed and her fainting head hung down upon her breast. Horrified, he stared upon her rounded form. He saw the holy stigmata upon her left side; the wound was open and from it flowed a thin stream of bright blood.

“It is the child’s blood,” he thought.

He grasped the cross with both hands and shook it. They tore him away, but, blind with rage, he beat around him in all directions with unnatural strength. He hurled them aside and grasped the cross, as if he would lift it and tear it up and throw it to the ground.

“Teresa!” he cried. “Teresa!”

He saw how her body trembled and so he let the cross go. She awakened from her swoon and her eyes opened slowly.

“Who called me?” she asked.

“Brother Pietro, who called me back to earth?”

The prophet raised his arm and pointed to Frank Braun.

“It was he, Holy Sister.”

She looked at him.

And she said, “What does the stranger want?”

“Teresa—” he besought her. “Teresa—”

But she did not listen. With a mighty effort she raised her eyes to heaven. Her lips moved silently. She prayed and spoke with God. Then she lowered her eyes and looked upon him once more.

She said, “The Lord sent you here in order that His will be fulfilled. Take the lance and do as He commands.”

He did not understand her.

“What?” he stammered. “What?”

But she called down:

“Brothers, don’t you hear me? The Lord sent him—even as He did the strange soldier who pierced the Savior’s side with a thrust of his lance, so shall he do. That is the Lord’s will. Hurry brothers, hurry!”

They seized him. He struck out wildly and kicked and bit. But they grasped him and threw him to the ground. They entangled his legs and his body; they held fast his hands and his arms and then stood him up. And Girolamo Scuro took Alvassi’s mighty pitchfork and forced it into his hand.

“Do as she commands!” Scuro cried hoarsely.

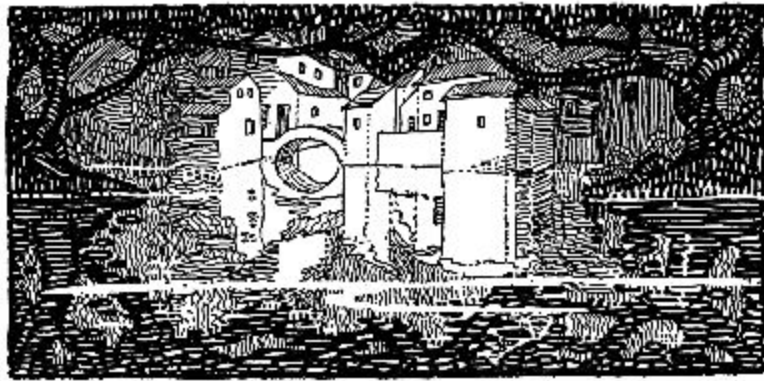
“No!” he cried. “No!”

He roared and howled but they would not let him go; they gagged him with a piece of cloth and silenced him. Scuro’s heavy hand enclosed his, which held the shaft, and pressed it as if in a vise so that he could not let go. They raised him upright and placed the sharp, curved spikes of the pitchfork against the saint’s body.

“The saint wills it!” the prophet cried. “Push on!”

With all his might he tried to get free, to loosen his hand, to drag the shaft downward. But they held him—eight powerful men—with wild, fanatical strength. And the will of her who hung upon the cross made their muscles as of iron. He was her puppet now. Then, with a mighty jerk, Girolamo Scuro pushed his elbow from below and forced his arm up high. And the spike entered the saint’s body and was buried in it to the very hilt—deep in—through mother and child—just where the stigmata gleamed. The saint cried out. A single, wild and fearful cry. They released him and he fell to the earth.





Chapter Fifteen

“Out—out are the lights—out all! And over each quivering form The Curtain, a funeral pall, Comes down with the rush of a Storm.”

-E.A. Poe, The Conqueror Worm



He hit his head against a hard stone. Now his face, too, was stained with blood. He lay there unconscious. He was in their way; they seized him, carried him aside and threw him among the tangled bushes of the slope. Then they knelt and prayed.

“O Lamb of God—”

There he lay and did not stir. But his ears rang with the saint’s piercing cry. Her cry, her fearful, horrible cry of death—the cry that tore all veils and pierced all fogs and brought the heavens down in ruins and hurled them into the ultimate abysses of hell. That cry annihilated him. He crept down through the bushes carefully on all fours, like a beast wounded to death.

Only away, away—wasn’t there some hole he could bury himself in? He seized stones and blackberry bushes, and beneath him the loose pebbles rattled down into the crevasse. Away—away— Then he came to a place where the land jutted out a little. He could go no farther; the cliff fell steeply into the lake. He stood up and thought—something sounded above him—ah, her voice, her voice—once again.

His ears listened intently and in the awful silence he heard the low words of her who was dying:

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Away! Away! Everything disappeared. He saw nothing, heard nothing. Only one thing raced through his fevered nerves: away, away! So he leaped down the mountainside. Oh, it was good to fly through the air. He fell, fell;

he fell for many hours. And the lake received him—softly and gently, and did him no harm: he dipped down almost to the bottom.

He thought:

“Now I am at home.”

And it seemed such a sweet thought to him to lie on the moist bottom. But the lake raised him up and gave him no refuge; spat him forth again as if he were unclean. He gasped for air, instinctively, like an animal; he divided the water and swam diagonally across the lake. He climbed on shore close to Raimondi’s house; thoughtlessly he approached it. Then, at the steps, he stood still—what did he want here? He looked upward—ah, the sun was far behind the hills! Val di Scodra lay in deep shadow. But perhaps the car which could carry him away was not yet gone! Up then, up the mountains to the road!

He dared not turn his head back towards the promontory of the crosses. He ran, ran. He saw the goat path on his right. He fled up it. His breath came in gasps, his garments dried upon his body and were then drenched again in his sweat. Suppose they were after him? Suppose they had seen him leap down from the promontory and swim across the lake? Suppose they were to catch him? Him—who had given the saint her death blow on the cross? A humiliating fear drove him, a dread as if death were upon him, weren’t they just emerging from the arbor? Didn’t he hear the heavy steps and the gurgling voice of Scuro? Suppose the giant seized him with his claws; suppose he spat upon him, as upon the sweet saint? Ah, he would not be able to lift a hand to defend himself!

He heard a crackling in the bushes! He heard it, unmistakably—he dragged himself and leaped—He saw the road—ten paces ahead of him—and even now, now! In his terror he fell upon his knees. He crept to one side and hid in the bushes—perhaps they would rush past him. It came nearer, nearer, up the path. He closed his eyes and pressed his hot head into the grass. But he knew very well that it would be useless, and his heart seemed to throb in his very mouth.

It was Marfa, the goat. She came nearer and licked his face tenderly with her rough tongue.

“Is it you, you?” he whispered.

Painfully he raised himself up. He clung to the animal's tether and let her drag him upward. Thus he arrived upon the road. Angelo was sitting on his handbag.

"Has the motor car passed?" he asked hastily.

The fellow answered, "No, sir, not yet."

He drew a deep breath. He was saved. He waited. He walked up and down the road and peered with all his might toward Monte Almego where, like a bright stripe, a stretch of road was visible. That was where the car would first come into sight. And yet it did not come—did not come. He listened—as if with a hundred ears; listened up the street for the noise of the motor car and listened down toward Val di Scodra whether there was some noise from the devil hunters pursuing him.

Would it not be better to follow the road? Then he would gain upon the car—but he knew that he could not go a hundred paces. He was wearied to death; his limbs felt broken. He stood at the edge of the road, held fast to a hazelnut branch and peered toward the west. Then something crept toward his feet and seemed to pass by his legs. He started violently; then he remembered.

"Go away, Marfa!"

But it was not the goat. It was a human being. Sibylla Madruzzo. He clung to the young tree so as not to fall. There crept the old beggar woman—as on the first day when he had set foot in the valley. Her back was bent; she was thrust forward, as taut as a bow, so that her tangled gray hair and head were scarcely above the level of her hips. She turned her face to the left, moved her dumb lips and squinted strangely upward. She leaned on her short staff and held out her right hand begging for alms. He dared not question her. He gave her a handful of silver coins and retreated shyly to one side.

"Go away," he whispered. "Go away!"

Was she not healed after all? Had it all been only a wild dream? Had he never left this road and fared down into the magic valley of Scodra? No, no! Vividly the image stood before him of the first devil's fight—in all its immediacy, almost able to be grasped. He stood in the prophet's hall, far at the end, near the long bench. And Teresa stood next to him and her arm was

around his neck and she held his hands and nestled close to him. Teresa—in those days she was still Teresa.

And the red torches glowed through the hall and Pietro stood under the image of Christ and his first disciples flourished their scourges. He saw once more how painfully the old beggar woman tried to make her way through the crowd. How she tugged at her dress and her wrap, how she thrust with her cane in order to get through. How she crouched before the prophet, how she scrawled her wish on a slip of paper. How the wild wife of Venier loosened her skirts and how the thorny rod descended upon her aged shoulders. And how she had raised herself up—first knelt—Then drew herself up to her full height. How her body, which had been bent in a horrible cramp for thirty long years, drew itself up and towered above all the bystanders by a full head—, she was healed! And it had been a miracle, a miracle! And now she crept around again pitifully contorted, writhing on the ground like a trodden worm.

And it seemed to him as if she were more bent, stiffer and more wretched than ever. He recalled that he had not seen her any longer at the meetings of the devil hunters since he had returned from Cimego. Her happiness had been so brief, so pitifully brief!

Then he thought: perhaps she was lying; perhaps she only played the part of the paralyzed beggar and was well and sound—sounder than he himself. Perhaps she had been stationed here by the peasants to watch him, to hold him fast, to jump at his throat at the last moment. Was she not calling? Was she not making a sign down the hill with her staff?

He turned around in horror and looked after her. But she limped to her stone with infinite pains and slowness. She sat down and he could see her face. Weather—beaten, ruined, as if carved of brown worm-eaten wood. No, no, she was not lying. She was paralyzed and bent—and only the miracle was a great lie. She was Sibylla Madruzzo, the old beggar woman. And he thought: The saint—? Oh, the saint—

“Never!” he cried aloud. “Never, never! She hangs on the cross. And I stabbed—”

He held both hands to his face.

“Never, never!” he cried.

And the steep walls of Monte Almegio caught the sound and threw it back:

“Never—never—”

He bit his lips. Why was he shouting so? Did he want to summon the pursuers? Breathlessly he peered toward the west. Would the motor car never come? Never? He went to Angelo. He wanted to ask him to help him when the enemies came. But he did not speak; he could not speak. He looked at the man as he sat there in his broad contentedness. He had put his right arm around the goat’s neck, his left hand played with her udders.

“You are happy!” he thought. “You alone.”

He asked, “How long have you been here?”

“All afternoon.”

“Do you know what happened down there?”

Angelo shook his head. “No, sir.”

“Didn’t you hear any noise?”

Angelo grinned slowly.

“Oh, yes, I heard a kind of screaming. Does it concern me, sir?”

Frank Braun said, “No, no, it doesn’t concern you—you are not from hereabouts.”

He left him standing and ran into the middle of the road.

“There it comes!” he cried. “There it comes!”

On the top of Monte Almegio the car came into view, raced swiftly across the narrow strip of road which one could see and hid itself in a cloud of white dust. Then he heard the hard hum of the motor and now it came nearer and nearer, like an arrow. The chauffeur blew his short horn. But Frank Braun stood still, stretched out his arms and forced him to stop.

“What do you want?” the chauffeur asked angrily.

“I want to go with you!” Frank Braun answered.

“I can’t take you. You see that all the places are occupied.”

Frank Braun came close up to him and seized his arm.

“You must take me away!” he cried. “I’ll throw myself under the wheels if you don’t.”

The chauffeur looked at him in surprise; he felt that this man was serious, "Sir," he said to his neighbor, "would you mind moving over a little?"

The gentleman did so grumbling and shaking his head. Frank Braun climbed up and wedged himself in next to the chauffeur. Angelo shoved the bag between the knees of the passengers and stretched out his hand.

"What do you want?" Frank Braun asked him.



Angelo grinned, pulled out his ten crown note and waved it. Frank Braun threw another bill at him without looking at it. It fluttered in the air and fell into the dust. Angelo picked it up and glanced at it swiftly. Then he jumped toward the car with a frightened face and held it up again.

“Sir,” said the chauffeur, “you have given the fellow a hundred crowns.”

“Keep it!” Frank Braun cried. “Keep it!”

He pressed the chauffeur’s arm.

“For heaven’s sake drive on!”

Shrugging his shoulders, the chauffeur jumped down and cranked the engine. Involuntarily Frank Braun turned his head and cast a last glance into the valley. And across the bushes he saw the promontory by the lake—with its four tall, mighty crosses.

“Drive on!” he cried in his mad fear. “Drive on.”

The chauffeur jumped up. At last the wheels were turning. At last. At last! Now he breathed more freely.

After a while he asked, “Will we get to the city in time to catch the evening steamer?” “No,” said the chauffeur. “Quite certainly not. I had a little accident behind Monte Almego—that is why the delay. And it doesn’t matter anyhow; all the passengers are guests of our hotel; they are staying and would not leave tonight anyway.”

“But I must leave!” said Frank Braun.

A new terror overcame him. The peasants would miss him, they would search for him. They would ask Angelo and Sibylla Madruzzo. Then they would hear that he had gone to the city. And they would start after him. And march—all night long. And next morning they would be standing guard under his window. Or they might make their way into the hotel, into his very room. And seize him, and drag him back. Back to Val di Scodra. To the promontory of the crosses. To the saint who hung up there. Oh, he was not safe in the city! He had to get away from there, too, that very evening—they must lose all trace of him. He wiped the sweat from his forehead; he forced himself to talk calmly.

“Do you hear?” he said to the chauffeur. “I must reach the steamer this very evening, at any price! Get all the speed out of your machine you can. You saw me give that fellow a hundred crowns, didn’t you? You’ll get three times as much if you arrive in time!”

The chauffeur thought a moment, sighed and shook his head.

“I’m sorry enough,” he answered. “God knows I’d like to earn the money. But it’s impossible. Unless the steamer has suffered as long a delay as I have, it can’t be done.”

Frank Braun whispered, “Drive on, then, drive on. Perhaps it was delayed!”

Then another thought came to him.

“Wouldn’t it be possible to drive to the next station at which the steamer stops? We might diminish the distance that way and succeed in reaching it!”

The other shook his head:

“No, sir. There’s no road in that direction.”

They fell silent. Feverishly Frank Braun sought for a way out. Nothing, nothing! Oh, they would catch him in the end! It was as if Scuro's red goiter were already quivering above his face. Then a postilion’s horn was heard. The chauffeur steered to the left and they passed the stage coach which came toward them. He looked into it—there sat the innkeeper next to a strong, ugly woman.

Frank Braun ducked—had Raimondi seen him? Ah, now they would surely come to fetch him from the city! They would tell the landlord that it was he who had given that final stab. They would come with him, all of them, all. Venier’s wife would strike her claws into his flesh and the dirty Alvassi would seize his hands. The prophet would lead them, and Ratti and Ronchi would stride in front of him when they brought him back in their triumphal procession—what would they do with him? First they would wait for three days for the saint to arise as she had predicted. And for three days and three long nights he would have to lie by her open grave.

But then? Then, when she did not arise from her grave? When the great hope was shattered, when the frightful light of common day with its terrible clearness wiped out all their holy madness? Ah, then he would fare just as young Ulpo had said: they would seize him in their raging madness

and hurl him alive into the sulfurous sea of flame! They would rend him with their teeth and strew—about the fragments of his body and feed the birds with his flesh! A fever shook him. His teeth rattled; in blind fear he hid his head in his hands.

After a while the chauffeur said softly:

“Perhaps we could drive to Tremosino. That isn’t far. It’s the next station.”

“Drive on!” the German whispered.

The chauffeur hesitated.

“Even then we’ll only catch the steamer if she has been delayed. Besides, Tremosino lies at the top of the mountain; to be sure there’s a cable car down to the lake. But it’s not without danger. Only the people of the place use it, and not all of them. And then I could get you to Tremosino, but I’m not able to tell whether you’ll meet the steamer.”

Frank Braun said, “Try it. You’ll get your money in any event!” The chauffeur turned the car back.

“Where now?” Frank Braun asked.

“The road to Tremosino leads to the right from the main road; we’ve already passed it. But it’s a loss of hardly four minutes.”

“Scarcely four minutes!” cried Frank Braun. “Four minutes! Drive on, man, as hard as your motor car can go!”

They raced through the twilight and up a miserable road. The car jumped like a ball over stones and hard furrows, and threw the scolding, passengers from their seats and shook them up. It was entirely dark when they reached the place. The chauffeur jumped down and hailed the peasants loudly; he asked whether the steamer had passed.

“It’s just coming,” someone answered.

He jerked out the handbag and threw it to the people.

“Take the gentleman down!” he cried.

Frank Braun gave him his money and ran with the peasants to the cliff. The cable car was old and in wretched condition, meant only to carry provisions up and down; the iron vehicles were scarcely larger than a strong basket. He jumped into one, a peasant with his bag into another. A whistle sounded and the small cars moved and crept with infinite slowness almost

vertically down the mountainside. He saw the steamer—it was making good speed and seemed to have no intention of stopping.

Above, he heard both the chauffeur and the peasants calling. They beckoned with lights and howled out into the night to the captain to stand by. Then they cried to those below to get a boat in readiness. Now the cable car went faster; it seemed as if the iron car were suddenly dropping. It bumped hard against the ground; Frank Braun toppled over forward and hit his forehead against the hard edge.

Stout arms lifted him out, hurried him to the shore, and threw him into the boat. They seized the oars and pulled out into the lake toward the steamer—the lights of which were slowly withdrawing into the darkness. The boatmen cried and roared; finally the steamer stopped. Frank Braun climbed on board. But he found no rest and no sense of security. His thoughts became confused. Had the people from Val di Scodra already reached the city? Were they already waiting, ready to fall upon him on the ship's arrival? With long strides he ran across the deck, back and forth, from one railing to the other.

Then they reached the city and the steamer stopped. The landing pier was almost empty, and on shore, too, there only stood a few people. He peered carefully around—no, no one was there. On the pier, in an open shed, he saw his trunks standing. He released them and had them brought on board. Every moment he peered down the dark valleys to look for one of the devil hunters. Someone came running from the square toward the pier. He was frightened again. Didn't it look like Ulpo, like young Giovanni Ulpo? Then he remembered that young Ulpo was dead. And now he saw that it was the porter of some hotel. The steam whistle shrieked. Once—twice—thrice—

The gang plank was pulled in and the railing closed. The engines started and the side wheels dipped into the water. He stood aft and looked back, and saw the city disappear with its last lights. Now they might come, now he had fled! They might throw themselves into the lake and swim after him like dogs—they would never reach him now! His terror had disappeared but there remained a passionate restlessness. He knew very well that he was safe now, even if his fear had had more foundation than mere fancy. And yet he still gazed sharply toward the shore and watched the deep blue waters of Lake Garda closely as if at any moment the huge goiter

of Girolamo Scuro might emerge from it. The steamer reached its final landing; but it had missed connection with the train that went on the great northward road.

The travelers climbed into carriages, chattered with the boat men and scattered in all directions. But Frank Braun didn't want to stay, not even here. He wanted to go as far as possible. A last train was leaving on the narrow gauge road; he took it. He sat wedged in among vintners and forest peasants and held his handbag firmly on his knees. He stared straight ahead and sank into a dull, apathetic brooding. His thoughts were unable to grasp anything any longer.

His lips moved softly and formed over and over again the same disconsolate words:

“O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world—”

A conductor roused him.

“Do you intend to keep sitting here?” he asked roughly.

Frank Braun looked around him distraught. He was alone.

“No,” he stammered.

He was at Mori. He went to the ticket office of the main road and asked for a ticket. He was told that the next train didn't leave till morning.

“And there's no train through here tonight?” he asked.

“No,” said the agent. “Only an express train going south.”

“How far?”

“Through to Venice.”

“When is it due?”

The agent looked at the clock.

“Immediately,” he answered. “It ought to be here in five minutes.”

Frank Braun sighed with relief.

“Give me a ticket.”

He boarded the train. With some trouble he succeeded in getting a stateroom. He closed the door. Heavily he let himself fall on the bed. Then the conductor came, then the inspector, then the sleeping car official—every minute another interruption. The tears almost came into his eyes.

“Why do they torment me?” he whispered.

Alas he had to get out to have his luggage examined. He opened his trunks and stood silently while the customs officials turned his things over.

“Anything subject to duty?”

He shook his head. At last he was back in the train. He undressed and lay down. Only to sleep—to sleep! But he did not sleep. He counted every quiver of the car and every beat of his heart. It beat slowly enough, but heavily and deeply and seemed to come up in his throat. He listened to the bumps of the rolling train.

“Now I am back where I was,” he thought. “Conquered, beaten, and trodden under foot. Once again!”

Ah,—it would never be any different! No matter how cleverly he donned the mask or how proudly he strode along like a Danton, a Caesar Borgia—his mask still fell. He stood there naked and desperate, a Hamlet. And Cain’s frightful mark of knowledge gleamed on his forehead—then his will fled. Reason and intellect—ah yes, they recognized what was happening, but they had no power to conquer. They dragged the heavy, leaden weight of reflection on their feet which bound them through their entire life.

Thus his strength was broken in a mere game, his power was shattered in a purposeless, phantasmal battle. But his will raced along, stupid and happy, shattering worlds and creating them anew, leaping lightly from deed to deed. Oh, this beautiful mask of his will! Now it lay blood stained, soiled and tattered in the torrid dusk of Val di Scodra.

He cried out after his will and every fiber of his body thirsted avidly and grew faint in a wild yearning for action. But his thoughts laughed aloud and said, “Whoever preaches the will, he is a weakling!”

Zarathustra had never been as soft and weak as when he cried, “Grow hard!”

Nietzsche had clearly felt that this was true and from his recognition of this truth arose the tragedy that drove him into madness. Nietzsche was an apprentice, only an apprentice, and no sorcerer like he was.

A fly crept across his face. He put out his hand and seized it between two fingers.

“Grow hard!”

He laughed bitterly and a hundred thoughts chased each other at once. What for? Let it fly! What do you want to do with its wretched bit of life? He opened the window and threw the insect out.

“Grow hard!” He sobbed.

The man of will would have destroyed it without a thought. It would have died between his fingers and the event of its death would scarcely have penetrated to that man’s brain. But he had to think and to reflect— He was incurable; his longing would never be fulfilled, his passionate longing for this mask which he loved so well.

And yet—perhaps? Some day—it would end—in madness? Then, then at last, his thoughts would be free from the terror of knowledge. Then the chains which his reason had forged would be broken. Then his will would range, free and glad, to shatter worlds and create them— yes, then! Wouldn’t it be best to be mad?

He leaned against the window and stared out into the night. He saw the names of stations, read letters and words without realizing what they meant. He threw himself on the bed, buried his head in the pillows and bit his teeth into them.

“O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us!”

He got up and dressed again. He ran through the train from end to end. Then he came back and sat down with his head in his hands. Day came and the train raced across the lagoons. Over Venice lay the first, old, poisonous glimmer of morning that he hated so. He entered a gondola, and with closed eyes he floated over the canals. When he mounted the stairs of his hotel he faltered, and fell. The porter caught him in his arms.

“You are ill, sir!” he said.

He led him to his room and helped him undress. He ran down and brought a bottle of vermouth. Greedily Frank Braun drank three large glassfuls. Then he fell on the bed. He slept, slept heavily for hours. When he awoke he lay still for a moment; then he pulled himself together, jumped up, rang, and ordered a cold bath. Only not to think, not to think! Only to be doing something—He shaved himself carefully and then entered the bath. The cold water refreshed him; he felt as if he were rinsing off a five

month's accumulation of thick dust. He dressed himself, took his hat and went out.

He walked across the square of St. Mark's, sat down at a little table of the Café Quadri and breakfasted. The waiter brought him a newspaper; he read eagerly and was as interested in every stupid detail as if he had followed the events from day to day. After he had read every line, he put the paper away, and looked across the square which gleamed in the warm sun of a late September day. It was almost empty, only far across near the wooden structure of the Campanile; fresh looking English children were feeding the doves. He looked toward St. Mark's and toward the Procurator's Palace. Strange! He had sat here a hundred times and knew every stone. And yet it all seemed strange to him today. So dreamlike and unreal—He hung his head and stared at the paving stones.

And from somewhere the wind carried to him these words:

“Then you will flee and eternal death will drive you onward, over seas and hills, through long valleys and broad plains. I see you sitting in a great square and the sun shining upon white marble. Round about arise tall palaces, but you are looking silently at the ground—”

“The saint's words,” he thought.

But all excitement had died and he was almost surprised at the heavy calm of his soul.

“Now someone will call me,” he murmured.

And someone did call his name. He did not look up and was not astonished. That was how it had to be.

“Frank Braun!” cried the voice. “Frank Braun!”

He knew the voice well—who was it? It was not the voice of the saint—and yet her voice sounded from this strange one.

And he whispered her words:

“Someone calls your name—but you hear my voice.”

He arose and said aloud:

“And the clouds cover the sun—”

The lady laughed:

“You’ve made a profound observation, Frank Braun, and an astrologer would envy you! A shadow passes over St. Mark’s Square and, without looking up, your philosophical mind draws the remarkable conclusion that a cloud is passing over the sun! It’s astonishing!”

He turned to the beautiful woman who stretched out her hand.

“Lotti Levi?” he said. “Lotti Levi, the Phoenician lady.”

“Am I still a Phoenician?” she laughed.

“Still,” he repeated. “Red hair, green eyes with thin black lines under them. Slender as Baaltis and nails stained with henna. Virginal breasts that know all vices and yearn to invent new ones.”

He turned his head and looked around.

“Aren’t those your parents over there?”

She nodded.

“Yes, they’re over there at the jeweler’s. I hope they’ll buy me the string of pearls that I like.”

She laughed again.

“Just keep still,” she continued, “I know very well what you’re thinking—Papa Levi: a little knock-kneed, short, thick lips, heavy nose and clever eyes. Mama Levi—but no, she’d be too horrified—and so Frau Privy Counselor of Commerce Levi—sorry! Born Ludmilla, Baroness von Kühbeck—emphasized, if you please—tall, large-boned, and still handsome and a trifle stupid. And finally: Lotti—type: Zoo animal. Is that right?”

“Yes,” said he. “That’s right, the best kind of mixed blood. You ought to put wild cherries in your hair.”

She laughed lightly:

“Or myrtles and orange blossoms. I have been the fiancée of a count for three weeks. Mama is charmed.”

He said, “It’s a pity! It’ll spoil the strain.”

She came close to him and looked at him sharply:

“I’m twenty-five years old. Twenty-five! For whom shall I wait? Do you expect me to marry you?”

“Heaven forbid!” he laughed.

“Marry your count by all means. But don’t have any children—at least not by him.”

She was vexed.

“You are unbearable!”

He gave her a chair and sat down himself.

“Oh, Lotte, you don’t even believe that yourself.”

She leaned both elbows on the table and looked straight at him.

“Very well, I don’t believe it. I’ll let you have it your way! But you must promise to go out with me this evening.”

“Where to?”

Her glance lay in wait, ready to leap upon its prey.

“It doesn’t matter,” she said. “I don’t know yet. I’ll lead you.”

“Good!” he said. “Besides—I might as well tell you—I’m delighted. I’m glad we met.”

“You are?” She spoke lightly, almost indifferently.

“Well so am I! I was bored here.”

He took her hand and kissed it.

“That is your hand, Lotte, unmistakably yours—clever and cruel.”

She laughed aloud.

“Oh, you’re the last one to say that—does anyone have crueller or more brutal claws than you have?”

He fell silent and a bitter expression came upon his lips.

“The mask!” he thought. “That wretched mask!”

She took a long look at him.

After a while she asked, “What are you doing here—at this time? The season is beginning in Berlin. Your friends expect you.”

He nodded wearily.

“Yes,” he said in a worn voice, “I’ll go there.”

Again she was silent for a while.

Then she said, “You seem to have been wiped out of existence—for six months. In what part of the earth have you been? What have you been

doing? And where do you come from?”

He got up quickly. But he felt faint and had to grasp the edge of the table. His face was pale and his eyes stared into space.

“Where do I come from? From the mountains, from a hole in the mountains. What did I do there? Oh,—I looked into the bowels of the earth.”

She touched his arm.

“And did you dance on the Witches’ Mountain? And did you celebrate a Sabbath with Satan?”

She laughed ironically.

“Confess now!”

He shook his head wearily.

“Perhaps I’ve only been writing a novel.”

She gave him her hand.

“There are my parents! Call at the hotel, if you want to. It’s the Danieli. Tonight at nine,—don’t make me wait!”

“All right!” he nodded.



Chapter Sixteen

*“Women often change Their minds,
mad is the man who relies on them.”*

-Francis I of France



He drove to the Lido and swam out into the sea. He strolled along the shore past the Capanni. He met a number of acquaintances and chatted here and there, uttering a few indifferent words. Late in the afternoon he drove back to the city. He went to the Danieli and sent in his card; the ladies were out but he met with the Councilor of Commerce. They sat in the smoking-room and talked. The Councilor told him that he had founded a new company for the manufacture of monoplanes.

“I thought you were connected with the Aero Plane Motor Company?” asked Frank Braun.

Old Levi laughed:

“Once, yes, I’m rid of all that now—very profitably! Nowadays I’m an enthusiast about aviation.”

“Are all the arrangements complete?” asked Frank Braun.

“If you have some small director’s job, please think of me. I collect such positions. I am a born director; I have a thoroughly representative personality, am discreet, never interfere and sign any document without reading it.”

“We might think about it,” said the Councilor. “There may be a vacancy. And then, too, there is the Karamin Company which I am founding; I need a couple of good names for it. Or do you insist on aviation, Doctor?”

“Not in the least—I’ll take either. Karamin? What is that?”

Mr. Levi noisily exhaled through his nose and struck his thigh with his rather stout fingers.

“I haven’t any idea, dear Doctor, not the least! It must be something like Mondamin or Palmin. But it’s a thoroughly sound proposition; we have fabulously good expert opinions!”

“I don’t doubt it. But in spite of that—I’d come rather high for that business, no offense meant!”

He took his leave; drove to his hotel, met some acquaintances and dined with them. It was a quarter past nine when he went to St. Mark’s Place.

“I can’t bear waiting today,” he thought, “so let her do it.”

Lotte came to meet him with long strides.

“I know,” he called out to her. “Furthermore, it was intentional and not by way of neglect. I was with people all day today. I didn’t want to be alone, not even for a few minutes. That was it.”

She offered him her arm.

“Fear?”

He shrugged his shoulder.

“As you please. Perhaps it was fear. Yesterday, to be sure, it was a bit worse than that.”

He put his arm through hers.

“Now this is better. Talk, please.”

“Thank you, you’re exceedingly kind. So you think I’m just good enough to drive away your bad mood?”

He pressed her arm gently.

“Oh, Lotte, we two needn’t pretend to each other. It is just as you think. But isn’t it also a whim of yours that makes you want to float through Venice with me tonight? You’re right, Lotte; there is something I don’t want to think of. And for this purpose some kind Providence sent Lotte Levi here who is well able to hold the attention of any man who walks beside her. That’s a compliment, my clever young lady. I’d like to think of something else and push my yesterday back into the farthest past: so I am the possible object of your passing wishes.

You must have some notion that allures you. I don’t know what it is, but I know very well that to you I seem most suitable for it. You have a

hundred acquaintances here and you couldn't use any one of them—for this particular purpose. But you can use me very well—and for that reason you were glad when you met me this morning. So I am the little beast on which you can test your poison. And since the little beast is ill and imagines that Lotte's poison might help it, it's willing to be friendly and to eat out of her hand. There you have our agreement, Lotte!"

She looked squarely at him and said, "Very well—yes."

"And therefore, Lotte," he continued, "the little animal must be caressed and very nicely treated. Save up all your malice for your little fiancé."

She pulled up her lips.

"You seem to think more of him than I do. To tell you the truth, now, I almost don't feel like it anymore."

"Like marrying?" he asked.

"Nonsense!—like executing my plan for this evening. You've almost disgusted me with my own wish."

"Disgusted?"

"Oh, you must not weigh every word. Not disgusted—then. But you've cut it off at the very root."

"Wait a bit, Lotte, it will sprout again. Where shall we go?"

"I don't care," she sighed. "Propose something."

They went under the arbors of the Procurator's Palace.

He pointed to a sign:

"Novelli is playing at the Goldoni Theater, tonight."

She nodded:

"As you please."

He read the signs—Hamlet.

"No," he said. "No! That's a frightful piece."

"Hamlet?"

She looked at him in astonishment. He drew her away.

"Yes," he said, "today—for me."

They went through the Merceria. They were silent and watched the crowd that thronged in front of them. Or looked into the bright show windows stuffed with cheap wares for strangers.

“Do talk, Lotte,” he begged.

He stood still and looked steadily at a gaily colored poster. It showed the Count of Monte Cristo as he was thrown into the sea in a sack.

“A picture show!” he cried good humoredly. “Shall we go in, Lotte? Oh, I haven’t seen a film in a long time.”

She said, “As you please.”

It sounded infinitely indifferent. And yet it seemed to him as if there were some intention in this indifference. He looked at her but she did not respond. They entered and sat down in a box near the front. They saw Blériot, how he flew over the canal with his aero plane.

“Oh, magnificent,” whispered Frank Braun. “Magnificent! By the way we must bring your father here. He is interested in aviation.”

She didn’t answer. During the intermission she asked him to bring her a program and read through it carefully. Then came the feature, The Story of the Count of Monte Cristo, made after Dumas father. It was a giant film by Gaumont that ran for two hours. A bit sentimental and middle class romantic, but magnificently played as to location and time and with thrilling particulars, which no stage in the world could even come close to achieving. The landing at Château d’If—

He was happy, was expressive as a boy. He told her of his visit with Gaumont and Pathé, spoke charmingly of these powerful establishments, told her how they made the films and explained a hundred good tricks to her.

“Ah, the Kientopp!” he cried enthusiastically.

“It is majestic what our time can create! I don’t know who discovered it—let’s say he is Thomas Alva Edison in double! But he is dearer to me than Marconi, Zeppelin, Röntgen, Koch, Cook and a hundred others!

The cinema lets us travel to all lands. It is the best historian, a fanatic about reality and one that knows no error. And at the same time cinema is the genuine alchemist, it breaks into pieces, what the reason preaches, and is the only magician in the world. It goes into the past and from the past into

the future; it makes the imagination into reality and reality into imagination. Isn't that wonderful? Have you ever seen a film run backwards? Just wait, I will speak to the projector operator later! Let's take the simplest example!

You, Lotte, sit there and smoke a cigarette: I will be the little film producer. You will then see on the film the Lotte who takes a match, lights it on the box, lights the cigarette and then throws the match away. Then she smokes and knocks the ashes into the ash tray. The cigarette becomes shorter and shorter. Finally she puts it out and shows her empty hand.

But now Lotte, lets run the film backwards. What happens? Lotte puts her empty hand over the ash tray, takes the cigarette out, not in and puts it to her mouth. She smokes,—that is— pretty little smoke rings fly back into Lotte's round mouth. The ash flies out of the ash tray to the glowing tip of the cigarette and the cigarette becomes longer and longer . . . Finally it is its original size, then a burning match flies up from the floor and ignites itself. But Lotte puts the match against the box and rubs it so that the flame goes out. Then the cigarette goes into her cigarette case and the match goes into its box and it is all over!—Now clever Lotte, isn't that magic?"

She sat silently but he didn't notice. Laughing, he chatted on.

Or, Lotte, I'm eating macaroni. The entire plate is full and I take a spoon and fork and eat in Italian style. I grab it with the fork and turn it pretty in the spoon and then it disappears between my teeth. Nothing remains at all, the plate is polished empty— I love macaroni, you know!

So now let's reverse the film. There is the empty plate and I take the fork from my mouth. It comes back full of macaroni. I unroll it in the spoon, take the fork from the plate, then place it empty again on the lips and take a new portion out! Unaesthetic?—But no trace! My macaroni is so clean and appetizing, as if it were newly cooked and dished out. And at the end I sit again in front of my plate which is piled high with macaroni—which I have long since eaten.

But those are little games, Lotte, that we can do any day. Now let's be a bit bolder and take a movie of your entire life. It first features your father, who wants to give his only daughter life; all later characteristics remain in images. She has his features. This man is always around her, when he is tired; one of his photographs represents him. Also the overflowing Baroness Kühlbeck, but at that time—horribly—simply Mrs. Ludmilla Lewi gives her Siegfried the expected child. Two doctors deliver it and one nurse. And

the good Mrs. Ludmilla is not doing very well at all. She swears softly that this will most certainly be the last time.

But Lotte grows up, becomes a little girl, then a teenager, a virgin, a young lady, and a young woman, then an older woman, then much older and finally very old at the end, until she dies and is buried. No, cremated, won't she? Bah, Lotte, it would be a beautiful and interesting film. And the dear afterworld would really be something to experience as well.

But I, Lotte, who will live even twenty more years, will want to take the film and watch Lotte's life backwards.

Out of the ashes, as if by magic Lotte, becomes a real body in the fire, a really old one, crippled and withered actually, but still a human body. And the dead body will come to life; the withered old woman will become an old woman. The old woman will become younger and the young woman will become a little girl, become a child and an infant. And again the clever people will stand at Mrs. Ludmilla's bed, but they won't be delivering Lotte this time! The doctor will take the freshly washed baby back from the nurse who washed it and it will become dirty. Then they will take it and Lotte will crawl once more into her mother's belly, where she first came from.

Lotte's gone, gone, as if she had never been born into this world! Oh, can you think of a better demonstration that all of life is such a big lie?

She looked at him, her narrow lips pulled up.

"You are such a dear boy," she said. Then she got up quickly, shook her head as if she wanted to chase some thought away.

"Come," she said. "We will go."

But he pleaded with her, "Oh, Lotte, just one more. One more, pretty please? After that I will do whatever you want.

She sighed and sat back down. She took her hat off and lightly brushed her reddish brown hair away from her forehead. She turned her head so that he couldn't see her face and stared out over the crowd. Then the long intermission ended. The lights went out.

On the white curtain gleamed the name of the film: "Snake Hunting in Java". The picture showed a shop in Batavia, a pretty native girl exhibits her wares to a white gentleman—all things are made of snake's skin. The gentleman is very eager to buy and also buys pocketbooks, letter-files, card cases, whips, canes and exquisite little slippers. He is certainly a very fine

gentleman, for he doesn't ask the price of any single object but takes out a cheque book and writes a cheque for the whole sum. Then he gives the address of his hotel, takes off his hat courteously and leaves.

"Now we'll see, Lotte, how these pretty things are made." Frank Braun whispered.

It was dark for a moment, and then another picture flashed out on the screen. Malays were passing through a clearing in the jungle, always in pairs, and striking with great cudgels into the tall grass to beat up the snakes. They found one and pounced down on it like cats. One benumbed the python by a powerful stroke to the head; the other threw a snare about its neck and pulled it tight. Then they carefully lifted the reptile which was at least two meters long and carried it to a big basket. Soon they caught a second snake in the same way; other men brought more. They caught seven brilliant, splendid pythons. They tied up the basket, put it on a strong donkey and wandered off.

It was dark for a moment. He felt Lotte's soft breath close by his ear. He wanted to say something, but already a new picture was flashed on the screen.

It showed a yard with a native bamboo hut to the right. In the middle was a large wooden scaffold to which, tied by the neck, the seven snakes hung motionless; their tails dragged a little on the ground. But they were alive. One of them—the second from the left—lifted its tail, climbed up on itself, devoured itself and twisted itself into a tight knot up on the scaffold.

Then a few men appeared—the same ones who had seized the first python in the forest. One carried a long knife in his hand; he approached one of the snakes. He made a circular incision around the throat, and another from the throat to the tip of the tail. Then he held the knife between his teeth and set all his fingers upon the circular wound. And while two others seized the animal's tail, held it fast and stretched it, he pulled the snake's tough skin from its body with all his might. Swiftly he went to the second snake and to the third, and in a few minutes the six snakes were flayed. Only the last which had tied itself into a knot was permitted to hang there.

And then a certain life came into the six flayed beasts. They looked snow-white in the picture, more gleamingly white than anything else in the world. And the mighty muscles of the animals worked in a slow death

struggle, and writhed and turned and looked like slender, carved marble columns, such as one sees in Moorish palaces. The bodies of six naked, skinless, snow-white snakes! The Malay stepped aside and took the skins and cleaned them.

But Frank Braun didn't look at what they were doing; he only looked only upon the six living snake bodies which had turned into marble columns—Once upon a time—he was a junior at college then he had gone into the monkey-house at the Zoo. Five children were laughing before the grating, boys and girls. He approached and saw that they were throwing little frogs to the monkeys. And the monkeys seized the struggling little frogs and skinned them alive. That was very cunning and the children laughed and rejoiced.

He struck at the monkeys with his cane so that they let their victims fall; he pushed the mutilated frogs out of the cage with his cane and, in rage and pity, killed them with his hard heel. And then he fell upon the children. Oh, he remembered very well how much good every vigorous box on the ear which he gave them seemed to do him, and how, during those blows, the dull, suffocating pressure that had settled down into his throat disappeared. He thought of that now.

But here he couldn't beat anyone. It was only a picture that he saw, only a picture. And there was nothing that could free him and give him air. And the picture that he stared at was beautiful, exceedingly beautiful. Six magnificent white, marble columns. And they lived—it was horrible—it was horrible—and it was so beautiful— Lotte laid her warm hand on his. He felt her greenish eyes resting upon him. Their glance penetrated the darkness and penetrated his skull. It crept into his brain and drank its fill of all that his soul felt at this moment. Her little hand passed over his cheek. She touched his ear lightly and drew her fingers with infinite gentleness around his neck and it seemed to him as if she were grasping his open skin and were tearing it off, as if he were himself hanging there, a naked, white, flayed python which was now turning into a living marble column—He bit his lips and closed his eyes. The hall grew light; they arose and went.

Outside he asked her:

“Have you been here before?”

She nodded.

“So that was it?” he asked.

And she nodded again. They went through the narrow street toward the canal.

“The film is by Pathé,” she said quietly. “It is run every evening in a thousand cities at the same hour. And hundreds of thousands of people see it. See it—just as they see any other. But I knew—”

She stopped. She looked aside and pulled at the silk kerchief which she held in her hand.

“That’s why I took you there.”

He asked, “And—?”

She gave a short laugh.

“Oh, it’s all right. I’m satisfied.”

He called out through the night:

“Gondola! Gondola!”

They entered one and floated quietly through Venice. The water of the canals was foul with the heat, malodorous and full of dirt. Midges and moths stood above it in huge swarms, and almost covered the surface like a delicate cloth. On both sides of them the palaces rose high and gleamed like death’s heads in the dull glimmer of the lamps.

False fronts, magnificent facades, which all day long pretended to a gleam of life, but now their dirty emptiness stared from a thousand dead eyes; and the dry rot of a perished splendor which the worms had long been eating grinned from the cracks and fissures. And he thought that Venice was one huge corpse. The flesh had long rotted, only the hard ribs and bones still stood erect. Broken here and there, gnawed, decayed and worm eaten, and yet, erect.

And they were swimming around in this dead giant’s body, were gliding noiselessly through one of its decaying veins. An odor of decay came from the fragments of this flesh and breathed its poisonous fever into the night. Obese rats ran over the foundation walls, jumped into the water and dived between the stakes. Hideous carrion crabs fled sidewise over the shattered stairs, and huge black wood-lice crept out of their holes.

The brain and the heart and the once breathing lungs had long disappeared through corruption. And men still lived like maggots in this

foul carrion whose stench lured them from afar. A gondola came to meet them, a black swimming coffin like all the others. It was covered, and under the black canopy a young couple sat pressed against each other.

“A bridal pair,” he thought, “one of the thousands of couples who glide through the lagoons year after year.”

Didn't it seem as if the passing couple became more ardent in this air impregnated by decay? Then he felt her hand. It was damp and cold, but this chill burnt into his flesh.

She said, “Frank Braun, I want a child.”

Her voice trembled; she looked at him and her eyes glowed with a strange green glow.

“By you,” she said.

