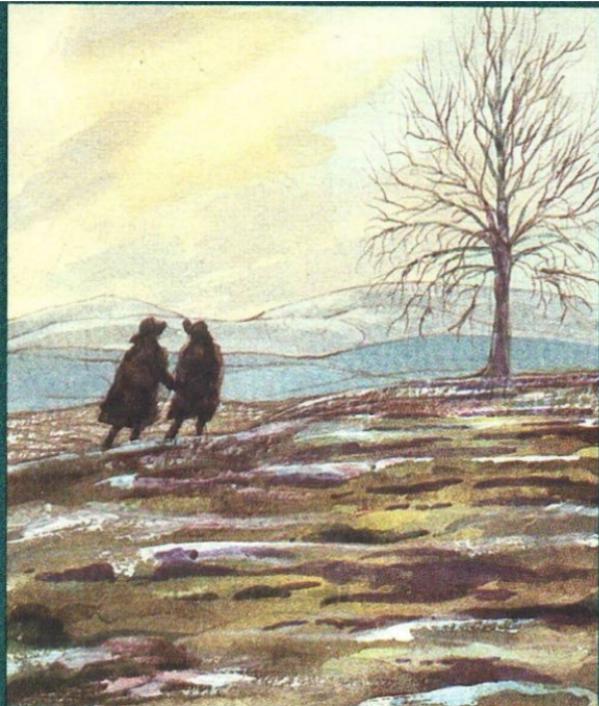


Hermann Hesse

Freunde



Narrative
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Thinking is not
perseverance, but
movement.

Hermann Hesse

Suhrkamp paperback 1284

Hermann Hesse, born on 2 July 1877 in Calw, Württemberg, the son of a Baltic German missionary and a Württemberg missionary's daughter, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946 and died on 9 August 1962 in Montagnola near Lugano.

His books, novels, stories, reflections, poems, political, literary and cultural criticism have now been distributed in more than 60 million copies worldwide, making him the most widely read European author of the 20th century in the USA and Japan.

Hesse first made this story, written around 1907 and published a year later in *Velhagen & Klasing's monthly magazine*, available again 50 years later in a bibliophile edition by the Oltener Bücherfreunde. It is set in the student milieu of Tübingen at the turn of the century and describes the process of individuation of the young Hans Calwer, who leaves the questionable security of his student fraternity after one and a half semesters, without his friend being able to follow him.

Like Hans Calwer, Hesse also came into contact with the alternative lifestyle of Buddhist thinking through reading Schopenhauer, but he was not yet ready to put it into practice. Hesse anticipated a theme here that he later explored and developed in a more complex way in *Demian* and *Siddhartha*.

Hermann Hesse

Friends

Story

Suhrkamp

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Friends

The low-ceilinged pub was full of smoke, the smell of beer, dust and noise. A couple of foxes were waving their bats at each other and cutting fleeting swirls in the thick tobacco smoke, a heavily drunk man was sitting on the floor and slurring a meaningless song, and a few older students were playing dice at the end of the table.

Hans Calwer waved to his friend Erwin Mühletal and headed for the door.

"Hey, leaving already?" one of the players called out.

Hans just nodded and left, Mühletal following him. They descended the old, steep wooden staircase and left the house, which was already quietening down. Cold winter night air and blue starlight greeted them on the empty, wide market square. Breathing deeply and unbuttoning his coat, Hans set off for his flat. His friend followed him silently for a while; he usually accompanied Calwer home almost every evening. But at the second alley, he stopped. "Yes," he said, "good night then. I'm going to bed."

"Good night," said Hans curtly and walked on. But after a few steps, he turned back and called out to his friend.

"Erwin!"

"Yes?"

"Listen, I'm coming with you."

"All right. But I'm going to bed, I'm already half asleep."

Hans turned around and took Erwin's arm. But he didn't lead him home, instead down to the river, over the old bridge and into the long plane tree avenue, and Erwin followed

along without protest. "So what's going on?" he finally asked. "I'm really tired."

"Really? Me too, but in a different way."

"Well?"

"In short, that was my last Wednesday pub night."

"You're crazy."

"No, you are, if you still enjoy the place. Shouting songs, getting drunk on command, listening to idiotic speeches and letting twenty simpletons grin at you and pat you on the back – I'm not doing that anymore. I joined back then, like everyone else, in a drunken haze. But I'm leaving sensibly and for good reasons. Tomorrow, in fact."

"Yes, but—"

"It's decided, and that's that. You're the only one who knows about it in advance; you're also the only one it concerns. I didn't want to ask your advice."

"Then I won't. So you're leaving. It won't be without scandal."

"Perhaps it will."

"Maybe. Well, that's your business. I'm not particularly surprised, you've always complained, and things are the same with us. Only, you know, it's no better elsewhere. Or do you want to join a corps, with your little change?"

"No. Do you think I'll leave today and join somewhere else tomorrow? Then I might as well stay, right? Corps or fraternity or country club, it's all the same. I want to be my own

master and never the buffoon of three dozen fraternity brothers. That's all."

"Yes, that's all. I should really advise you against it, but with you, one gets used to it. If you regret it after three weeks—"

"You really need to get some sleep. So go to bed and forgive me for wasting your precious time with such nonsense. Good night, I'm going for a walk."

Erwin ran after him, startled and somewhat annoyed. "It's really hard to talk to you. If I'm not allowed to say anything, why are you telling me this?"

"Oh, I thought you might be interested."

"For God's sake, Hans, be reasonable! Why all this friction between us?"

"You just didn't understand me."

"Oh, not again! Be sensible! You say six words, and as soon as I answer, you say you don't understand me! Now tell me clearly, what did you actually want?"

"To tell you that I'm leaving the fraternity tomorrow."

"And what else?"

"The rest is more your concern." Erwin began to understand.

"Oh, really?" he said with forced calm. "You're leaving tomorrow, after thinking about it long enough, and now you think I should rush headlong after you. But you know, the so-called tyranny in the fraternity

doesn't bother me that much, and there are people there who are good enough for me for the time being. With all due respect to our friendship, I don't want to be your poodle."

"Well, yes. As I said, I'm sorry I bothered you. Good day."

He walked away slowly, with a nervous, artificially light step that Erwin knew well. He watched him go, initially with the intention of calling him back, but from moment to moment that became more difficult. Then he left!

"Go on! Go on!" he growled under his breath and watched Hans until he disappeared into the darkness and the bluish light of the snowy night. Then he turned around and slowly walked back down the entire avenue, up the bridge steps and towards his flat. He was already sorry for everything, and his heart beat unwaveringly for his old friend. But at the same time, he thought of the last few weeks, how Hans had become increasingly difficult to please, increasingly proud and imperious. And now he wanted to persuade him to take an important step with two words, just as he had employed him as a schoolboy without further ado and without asking him to be his accomplice in his pranks. No, that was too much. He was right to let Hans go; it was perhaps for his own good. It now seemed to him that throughout their friendship he had always been the tolerated, the taken along, the subordinate; even his fraternity brothers had teased him about it often enough.

His pace quickened, a false sense of triumph driving him on, he felt brave and determined.

He quickly unlocked the gate, climbed the stairs and entered his little room, where he went to bed without turning on the light. Through the window, the cathedral tower looked in, surrounded by a blue circle of stars, and a tired, lingering glow glowed in the stove. Erwin couldn't sleep.

Angrily, he searched for one memory after another that suited his defiant mood. He appointed a lawyer within himself who had to agree with him and condemn Hans, and the lawyer had gathered a lot of material. At times, the lawyer was crude in his methods, even bringing nicknames and insults into the fray that the fraternity brothers had occasionally used against Hans, and repeating the arguments of earlier moments of indignation, which Erwin had always been ashamed of afterwards. He felt a little ashamed now, too, and occasionally interrupted the lawyer when he became spiteful. But what was the point of showing restraint and weighing his words now? Bitter and grim, he reshaped the image of their friendship until it represented nothing more than a violation that Hans had committed against him.

He was surprised at the flood of memories that came to his aid. There were days when he had come to Hans with worries and serious thoughts, and Hans had not taken him seriously at all, had offered him wine or dragged him along to a ball. Other times, when he had been quite cheerful and full of plans for pleasure, Hans had made him feel ashamed of his own merriment with just a glance and a few words.

. Once, Hans had even spoken downright insultingly about the girl Erwin was in love with at the time. Yes, and in the end, it was only because of Hansen's persuasion and for Hans' sake that he had joined the association. Actually, he would have liked the fraternity better.

Erwin couldn't find peace. He had to bring more and more hidden things to light, even legendary, distant, forgotten adventures from his early school days. Time and again, he had been the good-natured, patient, stupid one, and whenever there had been a disagreement, he had always been the first to come and ask for forgiveness or feign forgetfulness. Well, he was just a good guy. But what was the point of it all? What was it about this Hans Calwer that made people follow him around? Yes, he had a bit of wit and a certain confidence in his manner, and he could be witty, definitely. But on the other hand, he was quite conceited, played the interesting guy, looked down on everyone, forgot appointments and promises, and got angry himself if someone didn't keep their word to him. Well, that might have been acceptable, Hans was always a bit nervous, but this pride, this confidence, this always superior, contemptuous, dissatisfied arrogance was unforgivable.

Of the old, foolish memories, one was particularly persistent. They were both thirteen or fourteen years old at the time and had been stealing early plums every summer from a tree that belonged to Erwin's neighbour.

. This time, too, Erwin had watched the tree and examined it from time to time, and now one evening he had come to Hans happily and mysteriously and said, "Hey, they're ripe."

"What?" Hans had asked, making a face as if he didn't understand and was thinking of something else entirely. And then, when Erwin reminded him of the plums with astonishment and laughter, Hans had looked at him strangely and pityingly and said, "Plums? Oh, you mean I should steal plums? No, thank you."

Ah, big Hans! How he always made himself interesting! That's how it was with the plums, and that's exactly how it was with gymnastics, with recitation, with girls, with cycling. What had been taken for granted yesterday was dismissed today with a shrug and a look of no longer recognising it. Just like now, again, with leaving the fraternity! Erwin had wanted to join the fraternity at the time, but no, Hans didn't want that, and Erwin had given in. And now there was no mention of the fact that it had been Hans alone who had decided to join the fraternity. Of course, he had sometimes had to agree with Hans when he made fun of or complained about fraternity life. But that was no reason to go there, break his word and leave again, simply out of boredom. He, at any rate, would not do it, and certainly not for Hans' sake.

The hours rang out from the church tower through the cool night air, the embers in the stove had died down. Erwin calmed himself.

Slowly, his memories became confused and faded away, the arguments and accusations were exhausted, the stern lawyer fell silent, and yet he could not fall asleep. He was angry. Why? Erwin only needed to ask his heart. It was more tireless than anything else and, whether his head was angry and accusing or tired and silent, it beat unwaveringly and sadly for the friend who had walked away under the plane trees in the pale snowlight.

Meanwhile, Hans walked downstream through the parks, from avenue to avenue. His restless steps became steady as he walked longer, stopping here and there to look intently at the dark river and the dark, sleeping city. He no longer thought of Erwin. He considered what to do tomorrow, what to say and how to behave. It was unpleasant to announce his resignation from the fraternity, because his reasons for doing so were such that he could not express them and could not engage in answers and persuasion. He saw no other way than to refrain from any justification and let the wolves howl behind him. No arguments, no explanations about things that concerned him alone, and with people who didn't understand him anyway. He thought through what he wanted to say word by word. He knew that he would speak differently tomorrow, but the more thoroughly he thought through the situation in advance, the calmer he would remain. And that was what it all came down to: staying calm, putting up with a few misunderstandings, ignoring a few accusations, but above all refusing to engage in discussion

, not to play the misunderstood, the suffering, the accuser, the know-it-all or the reformer. Hans tried to imagine the faces of the senior and the others, especially those he disliked, whom he feared might provoke him and upset his composure. He saw them become astonished and unwilling, saw them take on the expressions of the judge, the offended friend, the benevolent supporter, and saw them become cold, dismissive, uncomprehending, almost hateful.

Finally, he smiled as if he had already been through it all. He thought back with amazement and curiosity to the time he joined the fraternity, to the whole strange first semester. He had actually arrived here quite coolly, albeit with many hopes. But then he got caught up in that strange frenzy that lasted eight days, where he was treated kindly by older students and drawn into conversation attentively. They found him bright and witty and told him so, they praised his social skills, which he had always doubted, they found him original. And in this intoxication, he allowed himself to be deceived. It seemed to him that he had come from a foreign land and loneliness to his peers, to a place and to people where he could feel he belonged, that he was not destined to be an oddball, as he had previously believed. The sociability he had often missed, the immersion in a community he had often bitterly lacked, seemed close, possible, attainable, even natural. That lasted for a while. He felt comfortable and saved, he

was grateful and open to everyone, shook hands with everyone, found everyone lovable, learned the pub customs with humorous pleasure and was able to sing along, quite moved, to some of the philosophical, dull songs. However, it did not last long. He soon realised how few people understood the meaning of dullness, how stereotypical the jokes were and how conventional the carelessly cordial manners of the fraternity were. He soon could no longer listen with any real seriousness to talk of the dignity and sanctity of the fraternity, its name, its colours, its flag, its weapons, and watched with curious cruelty the behaviour of old philistines who, during a visit to the university town, called on their 'young fraternity brothers', were filled with beer and joined in the youthful merriment with outdated gestures, which was still the same as in their day. He saw and heard how his comrades talked and thought about their studies, scientific work, future positions or professions. He observed what they read, how they judged their teachers; occasionally, he also heard their opinions about himself. Then he saw that everything was as it had been before and as it was everywhere else, and that he fitted into this community as little as he did into any other.

It had taken him from then until now to reach his decision. Without Erwin, it would have been quicker. Erwin had kept him there, partly through his old warm-hearted manner, partly through a sense of responsibility, since Erwin had followed him into the fraternity. It remained to be seen how Erwin would behave now. If he was happier over there, Hans had no right to drag him back into a different life with him

. He had been irritable and unfriendly, even today; but why did Erwin put up with it all?

Erwin was not an average person, but he was insecure and weak. Hans remembered their friendship going back to the early years, when Erwin had won him over after prolonged shy efforts. Since then, everything had come from Hans: games, pranks, fashions, sports, reading. Erwin had followed his friend's strangest ideas and most reckless thoughts with admiration and understanding; he had never really left him alone. But Hans felt that Erwin himself had done and thought very little. He had almost always understood him, always admired him, and gone along with everything. But they had not led a life together that had grown out of two separate lives; rather, Erwin had simply lived his friend's life. Hans now realised this, and the thought frightened him that even in this long-standing friendship, he had not been the insightful and knowledgeable one, as he had always believed. On the contrary, Erwin knew him better than anyone else, but he hardly knew Erwin. He had always been his mirror, his imitator. Perhaps in all the hours he was not with Hans, he had led a completely different life of his own. How well he had got on with some of his schoolmates and now with some of his fraternity brothers, with whom Hans had never had a relationship, not even one of dislike! It was sad. So had he really had no friends, no other life of his own?

He had had a companion, a listener, a yes-man, a henchman, nothing more.

Erwin's last words on that annoying evening came to mind: "I don't want to be your poodle." So Erwin himself had sensed what their relationship was like; he had occasionally allowed himself to be the poodle because he admired and liked Hans. And he had certainly felt this before and rebelled against it at times, but kept it secret from him. He had led a second, completely different life of his own, in which his friend had no part, of which he knew nothing, into which he did not fit.

In reluctant sorrow, Hans tried to turn away from these thoughts, which hurt his pride and made him feel poor. He now needed prudence and strength for other things; he did not want to worry about Erwin. And yet it was only now that he felt that, when leaving his fraternity, the only question and concern that really mattered to him was whether Erwin would come with him or abandon him. The rest was just a formality, a final step that had long since been dismissed internally. It was only Erwin who made it a risk and a test of strength. If Erwin stayed with the others and gave him up, then Hans had lost the battle, then his being and his life were really worth less than those of the others, then he could never hope to ever bind another person to himself and hold on to them. And if that was the case, then a bad time was coming for him, much worse than anything he had experienced before.

Once again, as had happened many times before, he was seized by a helpless, pitiful anger at all the deception in the world and at

himself that he had always trusted him despite his know-it-all attitude. It was the same with university and especially with student life. The university was an outdated, poorly organised school; it granted students seemingly almost limitless freedom, only to then thoroughly recapture them through a mechanical, formulaic examination system, without offering any protection against injustices ranging from benevolent patronage to bribery. Well, that didn't bother him much. But student life, the gradation of societies according to origin and money, the comical uniformity, the flag-waving speeches reminiscent of bourgeois male choirs, the swearing allegiance to flags and colours, the shabby and meaningless romanticism of old Heidelberg and student freedom, while at the same time paying homage to the crease in one's trousers – all this not only continued to exist, he himself had even fallen into the ridiculous trap!

Hans was reminded of a student who had sat next to him several times in a lecture on Oriental religious studies. He wore a thick, old-fashioned loden coat, heavy farmer's boots, patched trousers and a coarse, knitted scarf, and was probably a farmer's son studying theology. He always had a very refined, kind, almost appreciative and yet superior smile for his elegant colleagues, who were unknown to him and belonged to another world, with their caps and ribbons, fine overcoats and galoshes, gold pince-nez and straw-thin fashionable walking sticks. His somewhat comical figure often had something touching about it for Hans.

des, sometimes even impressive. Now he thought that this inconspicuous man was much closer to him than all his previous comrades, and he envied him a little for the contented calm with which he bore his isolation and his coarse cane boots. Here was someone who, like him, stood completely alone and yet seemed to be at peace, and who obviously did not feel the shameful need to be at least outwardly like the others.

Hans Calwer breathed a sigh of relief as he acknowledged the small package brought by the club servant, which contained a laconic final letter from the secretary and his commemoration book, along with a few small items of his property that had been left behind in the pub. The servant was very stiff and at first did not even want to accept a tip; he had certainly been specifically forbidden to do so. But when Hans offered him a thaler, he took it, thanked him profusely and said kindly:

"You shouldn't have done that, Mr Calwer."

"What?" asked Hans. "Giving you the thaler?"

"No, you shouldn't have left. That's always bad, you know. Well, I wish you well, Mr Calwer."

Hans was glad to have this embarrassing business behind him.

Yesterday, he had already given away two of his three caps and placed the third in his travel basket as a souvenir, along with a ribbon and a few photographs of his fraternity brothers. Now he placed the *Kommersbuch*, decorated with a tricolour shield, in the same place.

He closed the basket and wondered how quickly it was possible to get rid of all that. The appearance at the convention had been a little exciting and defamatory, but now everything was nicely taken care of.

He looked at the door. What he had suffered most was that at all hours of the day, fellow students would come into his flat, look at his pictures and criticise them, throw cigar ashes all over the table and floor, and steal his time and peace without bringing anything with them and without taking his hints that he wanted to work and be alone seriously. One morning, while Hans was out, one of them had even sat down at his table and found a manuscript in the drawer. It was his first major work and had the somewhat vain title

"Paraphrases on the Law of Conservation of Energy," and Hans had afterwards had to formally defend himself and lie to dispel the suspicion of being an eerie swot. Now he had peace and no longer needed to lie. He was ashamed of those unpleasant moments when he stood breathlessly behind closed doors and kept quiet while a comrade knocked outside, or when he listened, laughing and hiding his astonishment, as a question important to him was joked about in pub jargon. That was over now. Now he wanted to enjoy his freedom and peace like a reveller and work on his paraphrases undisturbed. He also wanted to rent a piano again. He had had one in the first month, but had given it back because it attracted visitors and because one

of his fraternity brothers had come almost every day and played waltzes. Now he hoped to experience many good, quiet evenings again, with lamplight, the smell of cigarettes, beloved books and good music. He also wanted to practise again to make up for the lost months.

Then he remembered another duty he had neglected. The professor of Oriental languages, whom he had met as an alumnus and co-founder of the fraternity and whose house he often visited, did not yet know about his resignation. He went there that same day.

The simple, quiet suburban cottage welcomed him with its familiar cosy cleanliness, small, comfortable rooms full of books and old pictures, and the scent of a quiet but hospitable life lived by kind, gracious people.

The professor welcomed him in his study, a large room with countless books, created by knocking down a wall. "Good day, Mr Calwer. What brings you here? I am receiving you here because I cannot interrupt my work for long. But since you have come at an unusual time, you must have a special reason, mustn't you?"

"Indeed. Allow me to say a few words, since I have unfortunately already disturbed you."

He accepted the professor's invitation to sit down and explained his situation.

"I don't know how you will take it, Professor, or whether you will accept my reasons. There is nothing that can be done about it now, I have resigned."

The slim, gaunt scholar smiled.

"Dear Sir, what can I say? If you did what you had to do, then everything is fine. However, I have a different opinion to yours about student society life. I think it is good and desirable for student freedom to establish its own rules in these societies and, in my opinion, to create a kind of organisation or state to which the individual submits. And I consider this particularly valuable for somewhat reclusive, not very sociable natures. What everyone has to learn later, often at the cost of painful sacrifices, they can get used to here in a more comfortable form: living together with others, belonging to a community, serving others and yet remaining independent. Everyone has to learn this at some point, and in my experience, a social preparatory school makes it much easier. I hope you find other ways to achieve this and do not prematurely retreat into scholarly or artistic solitude. Where it is necessary, it comes of its own accord; one does not have to call for it. At first glance, I see your decision as nothing more than the self-defence and reaction of a sensitive person to the disappointment that every social life brings at some point. It seems to me that you are a little neurasthenic, which makes it doubly understandable. It is not my place to offer further criticism."

There was a pause, Hans looked embarrassed and dissatisfied. Then the man looked at him kindly with his somewhat tired grey eyes.

"That your decision," he said with a smile, "could significantly change my opinion of you or diminish my respect

? Well then, you have known me well enough."

Hans stood up and thanked him warmly. Then he blushed slightly and said, "One more question, Professor! It is the main reason that brought me here. Must I now cease or limit my visits to your house? I am not sure about this and hope that you will not misinterpret my question, not take it as a request. I would just like a hint."

The professor shook his hand.

"Well, I'll give you a hint, but not a definitive answer. Just come as you have been doing. Except on Monday evenings, of course; they are 'open', but fraternity brothers come here regularly. Is that enough?"

"Yes, thank you very much. I'm so glad you're not angry with me. Goodbye, Professor."

Hans went out, down the stairs and through the garden, which was covered in a thin layer of delicate snow, to the street. He hadn't really expected anything else, and yet he was grateful for this kindness. If this house had never been open to him, nothing would have kept him in the city, which he couldn't leave anyway. The professor and his wife, for whom Hans had an almost loving admiration, seemed to him to be kindred spirits from his first visit. He believed that these two were among those people who take everything seriously and should actually be unhappy. And yet he saw that they were not, even though the woman was visibly saddened by her childlessness. It seemed to him that these people had achieved something

achieved something that perhaps was not denied to him either: a victory over themselves and the world and with it a tender, soulful warmth of life, such as one finds in sick people who are only physically ill and have gained a purified, beautiful life beyond all suffering for their endangered souls. The suffering that drags others down has done them good.

Hans thought with satisfaction that it was now time for a twilight drink at the Krone and that he did not have to go there. He went home, shovelled a few scoops of coal into the stove, walked up and down humming quietly and watched the early darkness fall. He felt good and believed he had a good time ahead of him, modest, diligent work, beautiful goals to strive for, and all the frugal contentment of a scholar's life, in which personal existence slips by almost unnoticed, since passion, struggle and restlessness of the heart can be undividedly pursued and bled dry on the unearthly ground of speculation. Since he was not a student, he wanted all the more to be a scholar, not to earn an exam or some office, but to measure and increase his strength and longing for great subjects.

He stopped playing the melody, lit the lamp and sat down, his fists pressed against his ears, over a heavily read volume of Schopenhauer filled with pencil marks and references. He began with the sentence that had already been underlined twice: "This peculiar satisfaction with words contributes more than anything else to the perpetuation of errors

. For, supported by the words and phrases handed down by his predecessors, everyone confidently passes over obscurities or problems, whereby these are propagated unnoticed from book to book through the centuries, and the thinking mind, especially in youth, begins to doubt whether it is only he who is incapable of understanding, or whether there really is something here that cannot be understood."

Hans, like most highly gifted people, was seemingly forgetful. A new state of mind, a new train of thought could temporarily fill and carry him away to such an extent that he completely forgot what was obvious, what had just been present and alive. This lasted until he had fully grasped and assimilated the new idea. Then not only was his painstakingly cultivated memory of the entire context of his life back, but images of great clarity often crowded into his mind in an often tiresome abundance. At such times, he suffered the bitter torment of all self-observers who are not creative artists.

For the moment, he had completely forgotten Erwin. He did not need him now; he felt satisfied in his regained freedom and tranquillity and thought neither ahead nor back, but satisfied his desire for solitude, reading and work, which had become a real hunger over the months, and felt that the time of noise and many comrades had sunk almost without a trace behind him.

Erwin felt differently. He had avoided meeting Hans and listened with defiant equanimity to the news of his resignation and the

annoying, and in some cases regretful, comments of his fraternity brothers with defiant equanimity. As a close friend of the runaway, he was exposed to many allusions in the first few days that increased his anger and reinforced his estrangement from Hans. For this time, he had no intention of giving in. But his willpower could not prevent every unfair and spiteful word about the departing member from hurting him. However, as he had no intention of suffering unnecessarily for the ungrateful man, he instinctively avoided being alone and thinking, spending the whole day with his comrades, talking and drinking himself into a foolish state of merriment.

And precisely because of this, he was unable to overcome the situation and could not rid himself of the troublesome friend in his heart. Instead, the artificial intoxication was followed by deep shame and despondency. Added to his

grief over the loss of his friend was self-reproach and remorseful recognition of his cowardice and his dishonest attempts to forget him. One day, ten days after Hansen left the fraternity, Erwin took part in a street parade. It was a sunny winter morning with a bright blue sky and fresh, dry air. In the narrow streets of the old town, the colourful caps of the strolling students shone in cheerful splendour, and dashing horsemen in dress uniforms trotted with a bright clatter over the hard, dry winter ground.

ground.

Erwin was out with a dozen comrades, all wearing ostentatious brick-red caps. They strolled slowly through the few main streets, greeting people of different colours

with great zeal and dignity, accepted humble greetings from servants, innkeepers and businessmen with careless pride, looked at shop windows, stopped to rest at busy street corners and talked loudly and casually about passing women and girls, professors, horsemen and horses.

As they stood in front of a bookshop, glancing at the pictures, books and posters on display, the shop door opened and Hans Calwer stepped out. All twelve or fifteen red caps turned away contemptuously or tried to express non-recognition, rejection, contempt, complete ignorance, even annihilation, with stiff faces and raised eyebrows.

Erwin, who almost collided with Hans, turned bright red and shyly turned away from the shop window with a fleeing gesture. Hans walked past with an impassive face and without any artificial haste; he had not noticed Erwin and did not feel at all self-conscious in front of the others. As he walked on, he was pleased that the sight of the all-too-familiar caps and faces had hardly excited him, and he thought with astonishment that only two weeks ago he had been one of them.

Erwin was unable to hide his agitation and embarrassment.

"Don't get upset!" said his valet good-naturedly. Another grumbled, "What a stuck-up guy! He barely dodged us! I would have loved to punch him."

"Nonsense," said the senior, calming him down. "He actually behaved impeccably. N'en parlons plus."

Erwin walked with them for another street, then excused himself briefly and ran home. Until then, he hadn't even thought that he might run into Hans on the street at any moment, and in fact he hadn't seen him at all in the last ten days. He didn't know if Hans had noticed and recognised him, but he felt guilty about this ridiculously undignified situation. It was too stupid; his dear friend was walking two steps away from him, and he wasn't even allowed to say good morning to him. In the first defiant days, he had even promised his valet that he would not have any "unofficial contact" with Hans Calwer. He no longer understood this himself and would not have minded breaking his word.

But Hans had not looked like someone mourning a lost school friend. His face and gait had been fresh and calm. He could see that face so clearly: the intelligent, cool eyes, the narrow, somewhat haughty mouth, the firm, clean-shaven cheeks and the light, oversized forehead. It was the same old head as in those early school days, when he had admired him so much and hardly dared to hope that this refined, confident, quietly passionate boy could ever become his friend. Now he had been, and Erwin had let him down.

Since Erwin had inflicted his pain over the break with Hans and had comforted himself with a cheerful demeanour

, he now found himself completely guilty of self-accusation. He forgot that Hans had often made it difficult for him to remain his friend, that he himself had often doubted Hansen's friendship in the past, that Hans could have sought him out or written to him long ago; he also forgot that he had really wanted to break off the unequal relationship, that he had never wanted to be the poodle. He forgot everything and saw only his loss and his guilt. And as he sat desperately at his small, uncomfortable desk, tears unexpectedly streamed from his eyes and fell onto his hand, his yellow gloves and his red cap.

When you think about it, it was Hans who had once taken him step by step from childhood into the realm of knowledge and responsibility. But now it seemed to Erwin that it was only since this loss that his initial, unbroken zest for life had left him. He thought of all the follies and omissions of his student days and felt tainted and fallen. And as much as he exaggerated in his moment of weakness, linking all this to Hans in a vague way, there was a certain truth in it. For Hans had been, without wanting to and without fully realising it, his conscience.

Thus, for Erwin, real pain and real guilt coincided with his first pang of nostalgia for childhood, which afflicts almost all young people from time to time and, depending on the circumstances, can take all forms from simple hangovers to genuine, foolishly meaningful youthful world-weariness. The boy's unresisting, unguarded mind lamented in this hour his friend, his guilt, his recklessness, the lost paradise of childhood, all together, and there was a lack of

defence, the boy's unresisting mind lamented his friend, his debt, his recklessness, the lost paradise of childhood, everything together, and there was no alert, cool mind to tell him that the root of all evil was to be found in his own soft, trusting, overly unstable nature.

That is precisely why the fit did not last long. Tears and despair made him tired; he went to bed early and slept long and soundly. And when, in the animalistic, well-rested mood of the new day, the memory of yesterday rose and new shadows threatened to spread around him, Erwin Mühletal was once again childish enough to seek comfort with his friends and a liqueur breakfast at the pastry shop. Surrounded by fresh faces and cheerful conversation, bathed in the splendour of colours, served verbosely by a pretty and quick-witted girl, he leaned wistfully and happily in his comfortable chair, brought small rolls to his mouth and mixed a strange drink from various liqueur bottles, which did not actually taste good, but gave him and the others a lot of pleasure and spread a light, floating, comfortable fog in their heads instead of thoughts. The fraternity brothers also thought Mühletal was a fine fellow today.

In the afternoon, Erwin took a little nap, but then his riding lesson perked him right up again, so he went to the Roter Ochse to court the new waitress. And since he had no luck there

luck there, but rather found the object of his desire occupied by a pack of one-year-olds, he ended the day contentedly in the café.

He carried on like this for quite a while, much like a sick person who, in moments of clarity, recognises his illness but hides it from himself by forgetting and seeking out pleasant stimuli. He can laugh, talk, dance, drink, work, read, but he cannot shake off a dull feeling that rarely rises to the surface of his consciousness, and for moments he is clearly reminded that death is sitting in his body, working and growing in secret.

He went for walks, rode, fenced, drank and went to the theatre, a healthy, dashing lad. But he was not at peace with himself and carried within him a hidden evil that he knew was there even in his good hours, gnawing at him. On the street, he often suddenly feared the possibility of encountering Hans. And at night, when he slept exhausted, his restless soul wandered down memory lane and knew once again that his friendship with Hans had been his greatest possession and that there was no point in denying or forgetting it.

Once, in Erwin's presence, a comrade pointed out to the others with a laugh that Erwin used so many expressions that came from Hans. Erwin said nothing, but he couldn't laugh along with them and soon left. So even now he was still dependent on Hans and couldn't deny that he belonged to him and owed entire parts of his life to him.

In the lectures of the orientalist, Hans Calwer had regularly encountered that rustic-looking listener and had often sat next to him. He had observed him attentively and, despite his helpless appearance, had grown to like his whole manner more and more. He had seen that the man took clean and effortless shorthand notes of the lectures and envied him for this skill, which he had never wanted to learn out of aversion.

Once again, he sat near him and observed the diligent man without neglecting the lecture. He saw with satisfaction the attentiveness and understanding expressed in his face and brought to life in his quiet movements. He saw him nod several times, smile once, and as he observed this lively face, he felt not only respect, but admiration and affection. He decided to get to know the student. When the lecture was over and the audience left the small room, Hans followed the loden coat from a distance to see where he lived. To his surprise, however, the stranger did not stop in any of the old streets where most of the cheap rooms to let were to be found, but walked towards a newer, sprawling part of town where there were gardens, private houses and villas and only wealthy people lived. Now Hans became curious and followed at a short distance. The man in the loden coat walked on and on, finally past the outermost villas and last garden gates, where the hitherto stately and well-kept street turned into a dirt road that led over a few small bumps, presumably farmland,

into a little-visited area completely unknown to Hans.

Hans followed him for another quarter of an hour or more, getting closer and closer to the man walking ahead. Now he had almost caught up with him, and the man heard his footsteps and turned around. He looked at Hans questioningly, with a calm gaze from clear, open, brown eyes. Hans took off his hat and said good day. The other man greeted him back, and both stopped walking.

"Are you going for a walk?" Hans finally asked.

"I'm going home."

"Yes, where do you live? Are there any houses out here?"

"Not here, but half an hour away. There's a village called Blaubachhausen, and that's where I live. But you've been known here for a long time, haven't you?"

"No, this is my first time out here," said Hans.

"May I walk with you for a while? My name is Calwer."

"Yes, I'd be delighted. My name is Heinrich Wirth. I've known you for a long time from Buddha College."

They walked side by side, and Hans instinctively matched his pace to his neighbour's more steady stride. After a moment of silence, Wirth said, "You used to always wear a red cap."

Hans laughed: "Yes," he said. "But that's over now. It was a misunderstanding, but it lasted a semester and a half.

And in winter, when it's cold, a hat is better."

Wirth looked at him and nodded. Almost embarrassed, he then said, "It's funny, but I'm glad about that."

"Why is that?"

"Oh, there's no particular reason. But I sometimes had the feeling that you didn't fit in there."

"Have you been watching me?"

"Not exactly. But you see each other. At first, it actually embarrassed me when you sat next to me. I thought: he's one of those impeccable people you can't look at without him getting angry. There are people like that, aren't there?"

"Yes, there are people like that. Oh yes."

"So. And then I realised I had been unfair to you. I realised that you had really come here to listen and learn."

"Well, I'm sure the others do too."

"Do you think so? I don't think many do. Most of them just want to take an exam, nothing more."

"But you still have to study for that."

"Yes, but not much. But you have to be there, attend the lectures and so on. What you can learn about Buddha in a lecture is not covered in the exam."

"True. But – if I may say so – universities aren't really there for a kind of edification. The non-scientific, religiously valuable aspects of Buddha, for example, can be found in a Reclam paperback."

"That's true. That's not what I mean either. By the way, I'm not a Buddhist, as you might think, even though I like Indians. Tell me, do you know Schopenhauer?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, then I can explain it to you quickly: I was once almost a Buddhist, as I understood it at the time. And Schopenhauer helped me with that."

"I don't quite understand."

"Well, the Indians see salvation in knowledge, don't they? Their ethics are nothing more than an exhortation to knowledge. That attracted me. But then I sat there and didn't know whether knowledge was not the path to what was right at all, or whether I just hadn't gained enough knowledge yet. And that would have gone on and on, of course, and would have destroyed me. So I started again with Schopenhauer, and his ultimate wisdom is that the activity of knowledge is not the highest, and therefore cannot lead to the goal on its own."

"To what goal?"

"Yes, that's a big question."

"Well, we'll talk about that another time. But I'm not quite sure why that helped you. How could you know whether Schopenhauer was right or the Indian teachings? One contradicts the other. So it was simply your choice."

"No, it isn't. The Indians had come a long way in terms of knowledge, but they had no theory of knowledge. Kant was the first to introduce that, and we can no longer do without it."

"That's right."

"Good. And Schopenhauer is based entirely on Kant. So I had to trust him, just as a pilot

sailor has more confidence in Zeppelin than in the tailor from Ulm, simply because real progress has been made since then. So the scales were not quite balanced, you see. But the main point lay elsewhere, of course. For me, it was one truth against another. But I could only grasp one with my intellect, for which it was flawless. The other, however, resonated with me; I could grasp it thoroughly, not just with my head."

"Yes, I understand. There's no point in arguing about that either. And since then you've been satisfied with Schopenhauer?" Heinrich Wirth stopped.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed animatedly, but with a smile. "Satisfied with Schopenhauer! What does that mean? One is grateful to a signpost that has saved one many detours, but one still asks the next one. Yes, if one could be satisfied with a philosopher! Then one would be at an end."

"But not at the destination?"

"No, truly not."

They looked at each other and enjoyed each other's company. They did not resume their philosophical conversation, as they both felt that the other was not interested in words and that they would first have to get to know each other better in order to talk about such things further. Hans felt as if he had suddenly found a friend, but he did not know whether the other took him just as seriously; he even had a suspicious feeling that, despite his carefree openness, Wirth was far too confident and steadfast to give himself away easily.

It was the first time he had felt such respect for someone of almost the same age and felt himself to be the recipient without being indignant about it.

Behind black, snow-stained furrows, the bright gables of a hamlet now rose up between bare fruit trees. The sound of threshing and a cow's mooing echoed through the silence of the empty fields.

"Blaubachhausen," said Wirth, pointing to the village. Hans wanted to say goodbye and turn back. He assumed that his acquaintance lived in poverty and did not want to show it, or that the village was perhaps his home and he lived there with his father and mother.

"You're almost home now," he said, "and I want to turn back too and make sure I get home for lunch."

"Don't do that," said Wirth kindly. "Come with me and see where I live and that I am not a vagrant, but have a very respectable cottage. You can also eat in the village, and if you are satisfied with milk, you can be my guest."

It was offered so naturally that he gladly accepted. They now descended a sunken path between thorny bushes towards the village. At the first house was a well trough, and a boy stood in front of it waiting for his cow to finish drinking. The animal turned its head with its beautiful, large eyes towards the approaching figures, and the boy ran over and shook hands with Wirth. Otherwise, the alley was wintery, empty and quiet. Hans found it strange to step unexpectedly from the streets and lecture halls of the city into this

corner of the village, and he was also surprised by his companion, who lived here and there and seemed at home, and who walked the quiet, long road to the city once or several times every day.

"You have a long way to go to the city," he said.

"An hour. Once you get used to it, it seems much less."

"And you live quite alone out there?"

"No, not at all. I live with farmers and know half the village."

"I mean, you probably don't have many visitors – students, friends –"

"You're the first person to visit me this winter. But during the summer semester, someone came by more often, a theologian. He wanted to read Plato with me, and we started and kept it up for three or four weeks. Then he gradually stopped coming. The journey was too far for him, and he still had friends in the city, so he lost interest. He's in Göttingen for the winter now."

He spoke calmly, almost indifferently, and Hans had the impression that this recluse was no longer affected by companionship, friendship or the breaking of friendships.

"Aren't you also a theologian?" he asked.

"No. I'm registered as a philologist. Apart from Indian studies, I'm taking Greek cultural history and Old High German. Next year, I hope there will be a Sanskrit seminar, which I want to attend. Otherwise, I work privately and spend three afternoons a week at the library."

They had arrived at Wirth's flat. The farmhouse stood quiet and clean with white plaster and red-painted half-timbering, separated from the road by an orchard. Chickens ran around, and beyond the farmyard, grain was being threshed on a large threshing floor. Wirth led his visitor into the house and up the narrow staircase, which smelled of hay and dried fruit. At the top, in the semi-darkness of the windowless hallway, he opened a door and warned his guest about the old-fashioned high threshold so that he wouldn't fall.

"Come in," said Wirth, "this is my home."

Despite its rustic simplicity, the room was much larger and more comfortable than Hansen's city room. It was a very large parlour with two wide windows. In a rather dark corner stood a bed and a small washstand with an enormous grey and blue earthenware water jug. Close to the windows and illuminated by both of them stood a very large desk made of fir wood, covered with books and notebooks, with a simple wooden table next to it. One of the outer walls was completely taken up by three tall bookcases filled to the top, and on the opposite wall stood a huge brown-yellow tiled stove, which was well heated. Other than that, there was only a wardrobe and a second, smaller table. On it stood an earthenware jug full of milk, next to it a wooden plate with a loaf of bread. Wirth brought a second stool and invited Hans to sit down.

"If you would like to join me," he said invitingly, "we

we'll eat right away. The cold air makes you hungry. Otherwise, I'll take you to the inn, whichever you prefer."

Hans preferred to stay. He was given a blue and white striped bowl without a handle, a plate and a knife. Wirth poured him some milk and cut him a piece of bread from the loaf, then helped himself. He cut his bread into long strips, which he dipped into the milk. Seeing that his guest was unfamiliar with this way of eating, he ran out again and came back with a spoon, which he placed in front of him.

They ate in silence, Hans not without embarrassment. When he had finished and wanted no more, Wirth went to the cupboard, brought a magnificent pear and offered it to him: "Here's something else for you, so you don't stay hungry. Take it, I have a whole basket full. They're from my mother, who sends me such good things all the time."

Calwer was astonished. He had been convinced that the man was a poor wretch and a scholarship student of theology, but now he had learned that he was engaged in nothing but breadless arts, and he could see from the impressive treasure trove of books that he could not be poor. For it was not an inherited or accidental gift library that one carries around and keeps without needing it, but a collection of good, partly brand-new books in simple, decent bindings, all apparently acquired in a few years. One bookcase contained poets of all nations and eras up to Hebbel and even Ibsen, along with the ancient authors.

Everything else was science, from various fields; a shelf full of unbound items contained many works by Tolstoy, a mass of brochures and Reclam paperbacks.

"How many books you have!" exclaimed Hans admiringly. "Even a Shakespeare. And Emerson. And there's Rhodes' 'Psyche'! That's a treasure."

"Well, yes. If there are things you want to read and don't have yourself, then take them! It would be nice if one could live without books, but one can't."

After an hour, Hans set off. Wirth had advised him to take a different, more scenic route back to the city and accompanied him for a short distance so that he wouldn't get lost. When they reached the lower village road, the surroundings seemed familiar to Hans, as if he had been here before. And when they passed a modern inn with a large chestnut garden, he suddenly remembered that day. It had been in his early days, right after he joined the fraternity. They had gone out in carriages and sat here in the garden, all cheerful and already drunk, in noisy merriment. He was ashamed. At that time, perhaps the theologian who later became unfaithful had been with Wirth, and they had read Plato.

When they parted, he was asked to come back, which he gladly promised. Only afterwards did it occur to him that he had not given his address. But he was sure he would meet his new acquaintance again at the Indian college.

All the way home, he wondered about him. His clumsy clothes, his living out there with farmers, his lunch of bread and milk, his mother sending him pears—it all fit together well, but it didn't fit with the many books and Wirth's speeches. He was certainly older than he looked and had already experienced and learned a great deal. His simple, uninhibited, free way of speaking, making acquaintances, engaging in conversation and yet remaining reserved was, in contrast to his otherwise appearance, almost urbane. But what was unforgettable was his gaze, the calm, clear, confident gaze from beautiful, warm, brown eyes.

What he had said about Schopenhauer and Indian philosophy was not new, but it sounded thoroughly lived, not read or memorised. In Hansen's memory, the word that the other man had used to describe his "goal" still resonated with an indefinably exciting, admonishing tone, like the lingering hum of a deep string.

What was that goal? Perhaps the same one that was still so obscure to him, yet already present as a premonition, while the other had already recognised it and was consciously pursuing it? But Hans thought he knew that every person had their own goal, each one different, and that apparent similarities could only be illusions. After all, it was possible for two people to walk long distances together and be friends. And he felt that he desired this man's friendship, that for the first time he was ready to submit to another

and to surrender himself, to accept a stranger's superiority willingly and gratefully.

Somewhat tired and frozen, he returned to the city as dusk was falling. He went home and made himself some tea; his landlady told him that a student had been there twice asking for him. The second time, he had Hansen's room opened and waited there for him for over an hour. He had left nothing behind. The woman did not know his name, but described him in such a way that Hans knew it had been Erwin.

The next day, he ran into him at the entrance to the auditorium. Erwin looked pale and sleep-deprived. He was wearing his fraternity colours and was in the company of fellow fraternity members, and when he recognised Hans, he turned his face away and deliberately looked away from him.

Hans considered whether he should visit him, but couldn't make up his mind. He knew Erwin's weakness and susceptibility well and had no doubt that it would be up to him to bring him back under his influence. But he himself did not know whether that would be good for both of them. Perhaps it was best that Erwin gradually forgot him and became more independent in his dealings with so many others. He was sorry to no longer have a friend, and it was strangely embarrassing to think that someone who had become a stranger to him should know him so well and share so many memories with him. But better than to force such an unbalanced relationship to continue! He admitted to himself that it felt a little good to be rid of the responsibility for his overly dependent friend.

In doing so, he forgot that just two weeks ago he had thought quite differently. At that time, it had seemed like a humiliating defeat when Erwin preferred to remain in the fraternity rather than continue their friendship, but now he felt indifferent about it. This was partly due to his current satisfaction with life, which made him calm, but even more so, and more than he himself knew, to his young admiration for Heinrich Wirth and his hope of gaining a new, very different kind of friend in him. Erwin had been a playmate, but the other could be a real participant in his thinking and life, an advisor, guide and companion.

Meanwhile, Erwin was not well. His comrades must have noticed his unequal, agitated nature, and some sensed that Hans was the cause. They let him know this occasionally, and one, a coarse fellow, made fun of Erwin's friendship with Hans, calling it a

"Lover" and asking him whether, now that Hans was thankfully gone, he didn't want to finally fall in love with a woman, as was customary among healthy young men. The furious rage that Erwin flew into almost led to a bloody brawl. He lunged at the mocker, who had to be forcibly pulled away from him, and the older comrades found no way to calm him down except to force the misbehaving boy to apologise to Erwin. Since the apology was forced and came as little from the heart as the request for it,

the rift remained wide open, and Erwin not only had an enemy he had to see every day, but also felt that the others treated him with a certain pity that robbed him of all his self-confidence. Now he no longer pretended to be bold only to himself, but also to the others, and he was not very successful at it.

On the day of that insult, he had made two mistakes towards Hans. Now he resented him for not being there and saw with sad satisfaction the moment he had missed when insult and fresh anger would have made it easier for him to take a bold and liberating step. He now let everything go again as it might, and it went badly enough. Under the eyes of his comrades, he kept himself upright by making a special effort in the carriage house and the riding school. His strength did not extend beyond that, and since he felt observed or spared by his comrades and yet could not bear to stay at home, at work or on lonely walks for long, he got into the habit of visiting cafés and drinking establishments at any time of the day, having a few glasses of beer here, a glass of wine there, a glass of liqueur here, so that he spent most of his time wandering around in a wild stupor. He was never seen really drunk, but he was also rarely completely sober, and in no time at all he had adopted some of the familiar drinking habits and gestures that are occasionally so comically droll, but in the long run are sad and hideous. Drunkenness born of joy or anger can be liberating, fun, and endearing

, while the semi-conscious stupor of the pub brother, who destroys his life in a comfortable, slow, sluggish way, is always a pity and disgusting.

The Christmas holidays brought a welcome break. Erwin travelled home and, feeling ill, stayed a week longer, allowing his mother and sister to care for him and delighting them, who were initially alarmed by his changed nature, with an almost boyish outburst of tenderness that corresponded to remorse for his foolishness and his volatile mind's need for refuge.

He had somewhat expected Hans Calwer to also spend the holidays in his hometown and that there would be a reconciliation or at least a discussion. He was disappointed in this regard. Calwer, whose parents were no longer alive, had used the holidays to go on a trip. Erwin, in his pathological dependence, left it at that and resumed his old life after returning to university. In his sober moments, it was quite clear to him that his situation was untenable, and he had actually long since decided to take off his red cap and confess his feelings to Hans. But in his state of self-pity and weakness, he kept drifting along, expecting from outside what he could only find within himself. Added to this was a new folly that soon held him in a dangerous grip.

In the manner of idle students who lacked both proper work and proper friends, he sought more and more distraction outside his social circle

and found in low-class pubs, which he was actually forbidden to visit, the company of poor devils, derailed students and swamp chickens. Among these people, alongside complete dullness, there were also some talented and original minds who, in the darkness of dissolute drinking dens, pursued a melancholic-revolutionary genius and could give the impression of significant originality, since they did nothing but impose a contrived meaning on their meaningless lives. Here, malicious wit, strikingly cheeky expressions and undisguised cynicism flourished.

When Erwin first met some of these people in a small, shabby suburban pub – it was shortly after Christmas – he eagerly embraced this mischief. He found the tone here far more witty than that of his fraternity, and yet he noticed that, despite all the jokes made about it, he enjoyed a certain respect here as a member of a prestigious, colourful fraternity.

Of course, he was fleeced the very first time. They found him "relatively palatable," even if "still very young," and they did him the honour of letting him pay the bill for the small dinner party.

In the end, none of this was too bad and would hardly have kept him there for more than a few evenings. But as soon as he proved himself to be a good guy and an occasional spender, they took him to a strange café called "Zum blauen Husaren" (The Blue Hussar), where they promised him unheard-of delights. These delights

did not look too promising; the place was dark and greasy, a miserable, light-shunning hole with an old billiard table and bad wines, and the obliging waitresses were not half as seductive as poor Mühletal had imagined. Nevertheless, he breathed a diabolically depraved air here and enjoyed the moderate yet harmless pleasure of lingering in a frowned-upon place with a guilty conscience.

And then, on his second visit to the "Blauer Husar" he also met the landlady's daughter. Her name was Miss Elvira and she ruled the roost in the house. A kind of regrettable, unscrupulous beauty gave her power over the young men, who were drawn to her like flies to glue and over whom she ruled with an iron fist. If she liked one of them, she would sit on his lap and kiss him, and if he was poor, she would let him drink for free. But if she was not in a good mood, even those who were otherwise well-liked were not allowed to joke or caress her. If she didn't like someone, she sent them away and banned them from the house, either permanently or temporarily. She didn't let drunkards in, even if they were friends. She treated beginners who still gave the impression of shy innocence maternally; she would not tolerate them getting drunk or being teased or robbed by the others. At times, she was fed up with everything again, then she was invisible all day or sat aloof in an upholstered armchair reading novels, and no one was allowed to disturb her. Her mother acquiesced to all her whims and was glad when things went smoothly.

When Erwin Mühletal saw her for the first time, Miss Elvira was sitting in her upholstered armchair, leafing distractedly and nervously through a poorly bound volume of an illustrated magazine, paying no attention to the guests and their activities. Her seemingly careless hairstyle allowed her well-groomed, beautiful, supple hair to hang far over her temples onto her pale, mobile and moody face, narrow eyelids with long lashes covering her eyes. Her idle left hand rested on the back of a large grey cat, which stared sleepily with green, slanted eyes.

Only when Erwin and his companions had long since been served wine and were busy playing dice did the young lady lift her eyelids and look at the new guests. She looked particularly at the newcomer, and Erwin felt embarrassed under her undisguised, scrutinising gaze. But she soon withdrew behind her folios again.

But when Erwin got up after an hour, dissatisfied, to leave, she rose, revealing her slender, supple figure, and nodded to him as he said goodbye, smiling almost imperceptibly and invitingly.

He left confused, unable to forget her tender, ironic, promising gaze and her delicate, ladylike figure. He no longer had the unwaveringly innocent gaze that only finds faultless health appealing, and yet he was inexperienced enough to take the act for real and see in the catlike young lady not an angel, but an attractively demonic woman.

From then on, whenever he was able to slip away from his companions in the evening, he sought out the "Blue Hussars" to spend a few exciting, happy hours or, depending on Elvira's mood, to suffer humiliation and annoyance. His desire for freedom, to which he had sacrificed his only friendship and which he also found the laws and duties of his student association tiresome in the long run, now submitted without resistance to the whims and moods of a coquettish and domineering girl who, moreover, lived in a repulsive cave and made no secret of the fact that she could love not just anyone, but several people, either one after the other or at the same time.

Thus Erwin followed the path that many a visitor to the "Blauer Husar" had taken before him. Once, Miss Elvira asked him to treat her to champagne; another time, she sent him home because he needed sleep; once she was invisible for two or three days; another time she entertained him with good things and lent him money.

In between, his heart and mind rebelled, creating desperate days for him with repeated self-accusations and resolutions that he knew would never be put into action.

One evening, after finding Elvira ungracious and wandering unhappily through the alleys, he passed Hansen's apartment and saw light in his window. He stopped and looked up with homesickness and shame. Hans sat at the piano upstairs playing *Tristan*, the music spilling out into the quiet, dark alley and echoing

in it, and Erwin paced back and forth and listened for a good quarter of an hour. Afterwards, when the piano fell silent, he almost went upstairs. Then the light in the window went out, and soon afterwards he saw his friend leaving the house accompanied by a tall, coarsely dressed young man. Erwin knew that Hans did not play *Tristan* for just anyone.

So he had found a friend again!

In the apartment of the student Wirth in Blaubachhausen, Hans sat by the brown tiled stove while Wirth paced back and forth in the spacious, low-ceilinged room.

"Well then," said Wirth, "that's easy to explain. I am a farmer's son, as you have probably already noticed. But my father was a special farmer. He belonged to a sect that was widespread in our area and, as far as I know, spent his whole life searching for the path to God and to a righteous life. He was well-to-do, almost rich, and managed his large farm well enough that, despite his good nature and charity, it grew rather than declined. But that was not the main thing for him. Much more important to him was what he called spiritual life. That took up almost all of his time. Although he attended church regularly, he did not agree with it, but found edification among his fellow sectarians in lay preaching and Bible interpretation. In his study, he had a whole series of books: annotated Bibles, reflections on the Gospels, a history of the Church, a history of the world, and a lot of

edifying, partly mystical literature. He did not know Böhme and Eckhart, but he knew German theology, some Pietists of the 17th century, namely Arnold, and then one of Swedenborg's works.

It was almost moving how he sought his way through the Bible with a few brothers in faith, always searching for an intuited light and always straying into the thicket, and how, with increasing age, he felt more and more that although his goal was the right one, his path was the wrong one. He felt that methodical study was essential, and since I had taken up his cause early on, he placed his hope in me and thought that if he let me study, devout seeking and real science would surely lead to a goal. He felt sorry for his farm, and even more so for his mother, but he made the sacrifice and sent me to city schools, even though I was the only son and should have taken over the farm. In the end, he died before I became a student, and it was perhaps better for him than if he had lived to see that I became neither a reformer nor an interpreter of scripture, nor even a true Christian in his sense. In a slightly different sense, I am, but he would hardly have understood that.

After his death, the farm was sold. My mother tried to persuade me to become a farmer again, but I had already made up my mind, and so she reluctantly gave in. She moved to the city to live with me, but she could hardly stand it for a year. Since then, she has been living at home in our village with relatives, and I visit her every

Year for a few weeks. Her pain now is that I am not studying for a degree and that she has no prospect of seeing me become a minister or doctor or professor anytime soon. But she knows from her father that those who are driven by the spirit cannot be helped with pleas or reasoning. Whenever I tell her that I have helped people here with the harvest or with pressing or threshing, she becomes pensive and sighs, imagining how wonderful it would be if I did that as a gentleman on our farm instead of leading an uncertain life with strangers.

He smiled and stopped. Then he sighed lightly and said, "Yes, it's strange. And after all, I don't even know if I won't die as a farmer after all. Perhaps one day I will buy a piece of land and learn to plough again. If you have to have a profession and you're not an exceptional person, there's nothing better than working the fields."

"Why is that?" cried Hans.

"Why? Because the farmer sows and reaps his own bread and is the only person who can live directly from the work of his hands, without having to convert his labour into money every day and then convert that money into food and clothing in a roundabout way. And also because his work always has a purpose. Almost everything a farmer does is necessary. What other people do is rarely necessary, and most of them might as well be doing something else. No one can live without fruit and bread. But

without most crafts, factories, even without science and books, one could live quite well, at least many people could."

"Yes, well. But ultimately, when the farmer is ill, he goes to the doctor, and when the farmer's wife needs comfort, she goes to the pastor."

"Some do, but not all. In any case, they need the comforter more than the doctor. A healthy farmer knows very few illnesses, and for those there are home remedies, and ultimately one dies. But most people need the pastor or another advisor in his place. That's why I don't want to become a farmer again until I can give advice, at least to myself."

"So that's your goal?"

"Yes. Do you have another? To be able to cope with the incomprehensible, to have the comforter within oneself, that's all. For some, knowledge helps, for others, faith, and some need both, and for most, neither helps much. My father tried it his way and failed; at least he never achieved complete peace."

"I don't think anyone achieves that."

"Oh yes. Think of Buddha! And then Jesus. What they achieved, I mean, they came to it in such human ways that one would think it must be possible for everyone. And I believe that many people have already achieved this without anyone knowing about it."

"Do you really believe that?"

"Certainly. Christians have saints and blessed ones. And Buddhists also have many Buddhas who have attained Buddhahood, perfection and complete salvation for their

person have attained Buddhahood, perfection and complete salvation. In this respect, they are just like the great Buddha, except that he went further and shared his path to salvation with the world. Likewise, Jesus did not keep his bliss and inner perfection to himself, but gave his teachings and sacrificed his life for them. If he was the most perfect human being, he also knew what he was doing, and like all the great teachers, he explicitly taught what was possible, not what was impossible."

"Well, yes. I haven't thought much about it. One can attach this or that meaning to life in order to comfort oneself. But it is still self-deception."

"Dear Mr Calwer, that won't get us very far. Self-deception is a word; you could say myth, religion, intuition or world view instead. What is real? You, me, the house, the village? Why? These riddles are unsolvable, of course, but are they really that important? We feel ourselves, we collide with other bodies with our bodies and with riddles with our minds. It is not a matter of removing the wall, but of finding the door. Doubting the reality of things is a state of mind; one can remain in it, but one does not do so when one thinks. For thinking is not remaining, but movement. And for us, it is not important to solve what we recognise as unsolvable."

"Yes, but if we cannot explain the world, why bother thinking?"

"Why? To do what is possible. If everyone wanted to be so

modest, we would have no Copernicus, no Newton, no Plato and no Kant. You're not serious about that, are you?"

"Indeed, not like that. I just mean that of all theories, those about ethics are the most dangerous."

"Yes. But I wasn't talking about theories, I was talking about people whose lives are about solving problems, about redemption. But we're still too far apart; we need to get to know each other better first, then we'll find common ground where we can really understand each other."

"Yes, I hope so. We really are far apart, that is, you are far ahead of me. You are already starting to build, and I am still tearing down and making space. I have learned nothing but to be suspicious and analyse, and I don't know yet if I will ever be able to do anything else."

"Who knows? You played for me yesterday and, from a few rehearsals and pieces, gave me an idea of a work of art, so that I really got something out of it. That's no longer analysis. – But come on now, let's go outside before it gets dark."

They stepped out of the house together into the cold, sunless January afternoon and sought out a hill on rough, frozen country lanes, where finely branched birch trees stood and a view opened up onto two stream valleys, the nearby town and distant villages and hills.

When the two started talking again, it was about personal matters. Hans talked about his parents, his boyish days, his studies so far.

studies. They realised that Wirth was almost four years older than Hans. Hans walked alongside Wirth with the almost fearful feeling that this man was destined to be his friend and that it was not yet time to talk about it, and perhaps not for a long time to come. He felt that his acquaintance was dissimilar to him in nature and that a friendship with him could not be based on rapprochement and blending, but only on each man approaching the other in freedom, conscious of his own nature, and granting each other rights.

And yet Hans felt less sure of himself than ever. Since the awakening of his consciousness, he had appeared to himself as a person who did not belong to the crowd, who was very clearly distinct from everyone else; it had always been a burden to him to know that he was so young. Instead, now, in front of Wirth, he felt unfinished and really young. He now realised that his superiority over Erwin Mühletal and other comrades had given him a false sense of security and had been abused by him. In front of this Heinrich Wirth, it was not enough to be a little witty and dialectically skilled. Here he had to take himself more seriously, be more modest, not present his hopes as fulfilments. This friendship would no longer be a game or a luxury, but a constant measuring of his strength and value against the other. Wirth was a person for whom all problems in thought and life ultimately became ethical tasks, and Hans felt, not without embarrassment,

that this was a completely different armour than his intellectual habitus, which had too much aestheticism in it.

Wirth was less concerned. He sensed that Hans had a need for friendship and welcomed him into his heart. But Hans was not the first to approach him in this way, and he prepared himself in advance to see him fall away again one day. Perhaps Calwer was also one of the many who "were interested in his goals," and interest was not what Wirth needed, but lively sympathy, sacrifice, devotion. What he did not demand of anyone else, he would have to demand of a friend. Nevertheless, he felt an unintentional, gently compelling affection for Hans. Hans had something that Wirth lacked and therefore valued all the more: an innate affinity for beauty, for art that served no purpose. Art was the only area of higher life to which he had remained, with regret, a stranger, and yet he sensed that it held salvation. That is why he did not see Hans as a student who would learn a few things from him and then move on, but felt the possibility and hope of learning from him himself and having a guide in him.

Thoughtfully, they said goodbye to each other without finding a warm tone. They had become close too quickly and both felt an instinctive reluctance to give themselves over to the moment of complete openness without which no acquaintance becomes friendship.

After a hundred steps, Hans turned around and looked back at the other man, half hoping that he would look back too. But the other man walked away at a steady pace, towards his village and the early evening twilight, looking every bit like a seasoned man who walks his hard path alone as confidently as he would with a companion, and who is not easily swayed by inclinations and desires.

"He walks as if in armour," thought Hans, and felt a burning desire to secretly meet this well-armed man and wound him through an unguarded gap. And he decided to wait and remain silent until even this determined man would one day be weak and human and in need of love. Without knowing or thinking about it, his hope, desire and suffering were almost exactly the same as they had been long ago, in his boyhood, when Erwin had pursued him with courtship and longing patience. Hans did not think about him today, and not much at all anymore. He did not know that someone was suffering because of him and going astray.

Erwin was still in love with Miss Elvira, or believed himself to be. Nevertheless, he approached his dissolute life with a certain caution and had recently begun to have frequent moments of reckoning and good intentions. His true nature, however numb and helpless it might be at the moment, secretly rebelled against his unsavoury surroundings with a moral malaise. The

The moody Elvira made this easier for him by being mostly aloof and snappy and giving preference to two or three other regulars over him.

At times, Erwin thought he had already put all that behind him and knew the way back to self-respect and comfort. All it took was a strong decision, a short period of steadfast abstinence, perhaps a confession. But none of this came easily, and the still boyish delinquent was shocked to discover that bad habits cannot be changed like a shirt and that a child must first be painfully burned before it learns to recognise and avoid fire. He believed that he had been burned enough and had tasted enough misery, but he was very much mistaken. There were still bitter experiences in store for him that he had not imagined.

One day, while he was still in bed, he was visited by his valet, a smart and elegant student whom he had liked at first. Recently, however, his relationship with the whole company had become so tense and artificial that he had hardly any personal contact with any of them. Therefore, the unexpected visit aroused his unease and mistrust.

"Hello, valet," he called out, yawning artificially, and sat up in bed.

"How are you, little one? Still in bed?"

"Yes, I'll be up in a minute. Is it Hauboden today?"

"That's up to you."

"Well."

"Now listen, youngster! It seems to me that there are some things that, to my surprise, you don't know yourself. I'll have to revise that a little."

"Right now?"

"It'll be best. I would have told you the other day, but you're never at home. And I don't want to look for you at the Golden Star."

"At the Golden Star? Why?"

"Don't jump to conclusions, lad! You've been seen at the Golden Star twice, and you know you're not allowed in there."

"I was never there in uniform."

"I hope so! But you shouldn't go there at all, or to the Walfisch either. And you shouldn't associate with medical student Häseler, whom no respectable person will have anything to do with, or with philosophy student Meyer, who was expelled from the Rhenanen three semesters ago for cheating and who skipped out on two debts."

"Good heavens, I couldn't have known that."

"All the better that you didn't know. The fact that you prefer the company of these gentlemen to that of your fraternity brothers makes it a little less embarrassing for us."

"You know very well why I stayed away from the Cameradi."

"Yes, the story with Calwer –"

"And the way I was insulted by you guys—"

"Please, that was one person, admittedly a boor, and he apologised."

"Yes, what am I supposed to do? Then I'll just leave."

"That's easy to say. But if you're a decent bloke, you won't do that. You mustn't forget that you're not Calwer. His case was different. His departure was embarrassing for us, but – all credit to him – he was a decent bloke. With you, it's a little different."

"Really? I'm not impeccable?"

"No, lad, I'm sorry. By the way, try not to get upset, for my sake. My visit is not official, as you might think, I came as a friend. So be sensible! You see, if you wanted to leave us now, it wouldn't be very nice of you, because you've done some stupid things and you should put them right first. It doesn't take much. A few weeks of impeccable behaviour, nothing more. Then your useless thoughts will disappear. Look, many have been in your situation before, your little excesses are still harmless, and much worse things have been put right. – And then, to add to that, it could be embarrassing for you if you wanted to leave now."

"Why?"

"Don't you understand? Someone might beat you to it."

"You mean kick me out? Because I've been to the Golden Star a few times?"

"Yes, there's no real reason for it. But you know, in an emergency, they might do it. It would be harsh,

and unfair, but there's nothing you could do about it. And then you'd be finished. It might be fun to have a drink with a few down-and-outs now and then, but to be dependent on them – no, that would be bad, even for more robust characters than yours."

"But what am I supposed to do?"

"Nothing, except to break off contact with them. You don't need to worry about being questioned. I'll say that you realised your behaviour had been less than desirable lately and promised me you would make amends immediately and thoroughly. Then everything will be settled."

"But what if I don't fit in with you and don't feel comfortable with you?"

"That's your business. I only know that many have felt that way and have completely gotten over it. It will be the same for you. And if there's no other way, you can always leave. But not now, under any circumstances."

"I understand. I'm also grateful that you want to help me, really. So I'll never go back to the

"Stern" and do my best to satisfy you. Is that enough?

"Fine by me. But please remember that I – I wanted to say that I've taken the blame for this stupid mistake so that you won't get an official warning. Of course, I can only do this once, as you can imagine. If you ever again –"

"Of course. You've already done more than you had to."

"All right. Now pull yourself together a little: show up more often, even when there's nothing official going on, go to the café and go shopping more often, and make an effort in the attic. Then everything will be fine."

That was not Erwin's opinion, of course. He thought everything had gotten worse and had neither the hope nor the intention of completing a satisfying career as a fraternity student. He decided to stay in the fraternity only until he could leave voluntarily with dignity and honour, perhaps until the end of the semester.

Erwin also avoided those forbidden pubs and their regulars from then on, without missing them. With the exception of the 'Blauer Husar', that is. He returned there after only a few days, albeit with the half-intention of making it a farewell visit. But he hadn't counted on Elvira. She immediately noticed how he was feeling and was so kind and approachable that day that he returned the very next day. She easily coaxed the secret of his worries out of him. She urged him to stay in his relationship, otherwise she would never see him again. So he stole back into the terrible house again and again, feeling like a thief, and fell as deeply as ever under the girl's spell. And as soon as she was completely sure of him again, all his moods returned. In anger and real bitterness, he made a violent scene, but with bad results. She let him rage and quietly produced a small, untidy little book in which his drinking debts and the occasional loans he had received

cash loans he had received, which he had long since forgotten and whose repayment he had offered her earlier, but which she had laughingly refused at the time, were recorded sum by sum and amounted to a surprisingly high total. Champagne and expensive wine had often been drunk on pleasant evenings without him expressly ordering it, and his drinking companions had diligently kept up with him and had it poured. These bottles and flasks were also all carefully counted here in the little book and stared at him with a treacherous grin. The total amount was far too large for him to pay off, even gradually, from his monthly income, and unfortunately, these were not his only debts.

"Is that true or not?" asked Miss Elvira with quiet majesty. She was fully prepared for him to protest and, if necessary, would have cancelled a good part of it. But Erwin did not protest.

"Yes, that must be it," he said resignedly and meekly. "I'm sorry, I hadn't thought of that at the time. Of course I want to pay it back as soon as possible. Can you wait a little longer?"

This success exceeded her expectations so much that she was moved and caressed him maternally.

"You see," she said gently, "I don't mean any harm. I just wanted to remind you that I don't just have insults to offer you. If you behave yourself, the little book will stay where it is, I don't need the money, and when I remember, I'll throw it in the fire. But if you're never satisfied and keep upsetting me,

then it could happen that I might one day talk about your account with the gentlemen of your association."

Erwin turned pale and stared at her.

"Well," she laughed, "you don't need to be afraid."

It was too late. He was afraid; he now knew that he was caught in a trap and that his days depended on the mercy of a speculator.

"Yes, yes," he said and smiled stupidly. And then he walked away humbly and sadly. His previous misery, he now realised, had been childish and his despair ridiculous. Now he suddenly knew where a little recklessness and foolishness could lead, and he saw the environment into which he had fallen, with as much innocence as guilty conscience, suddenly in a mercilessly harsh light.

Something had to be done. He couldn't go around with a noose around his neck. And all the uncleanliness and misdeeds of these past few months, which yesterday had still carried a semblance of amiability and non-commitment, now surrounded him unexpectedly, hideous and overwhelming, like the swamp that surrounds someone who, after a few tentative steps, suddenly sinks up to their neck.

Like every young person, Erwin had occasionally, in moments of recklessness, entertained the thought that when all joy was over, one could take a revolver and end it all. Now that hardship had arrived, even this poor consolation had vanished and no longer even occurred to him as a possibility. It was not a question of committing one last act of cowardice

but to take full responsibility for a terrible, annoying series of stupid pranks and, if possible, to atone for them. He had awakened from a dreamlike, irresponsible, incomprehensible twilight state and did not think for a moment of falling asleep again.

He spent the night making plans. As necessary as it was to seek help, he was driven even more powerfully to contemplate the incomprehensible again and again with amazement and horror. Had he become a completely different person in just a few weeks? Had he been blind? He felt horror at this, but he knew it was a retrospective horror; the danger was over. Only this debt had to be paid off immediately at any cost; everything else would fall into place by itself.

By morning, his plan was ready.

He went to his valet, whom he found shaving. The valet was startled by his appearance and feared that some misfortune was afoot. Erwin asked him to excuse him for a day or two, as he had to leave immediately.

"Has someone died?" asked the other sympathetically, and Erwin, in his haste, willingly accepted the white lie offered to him. "Yes," he said quickly. "But I can't give you any information right now. I'll be back the day after tomorrow at the latest. Please excuse me from fencing class! I'll tell you later. Thank you and goodbye!"

He ran off to the railway station. In the afternoon, he arrived in his hometown and quickly made his way to his brother-in-law's office, taking a detour to avoid his mother's house. His brother-in-law was a partner in a small factory and the only person Erwin could turn to for money at the moment.

His brother-in-law was quite surprised to see him there and became rather cold when he immediately explained that he was in financial difficulties. Then they both sat down opposite each other in an adjoining room, and Erwin looked with embarrassment at his sister's husband, for whom he had never had much interest, with his modest, solid face. But he had to hurt himself and pay the price at some point, so he preferred to do it right away, and after taking a few breaths, he revealed himself and made a complete confession to the astonished businessman. It lasted a good hour, with a few brief questions in between.

This was followed by an awkward pause. Finally, his brother-in-law asked, "And what will you do if I can't give you the money?"

Erwin had gone so far in his confession that he was close to the limit and almost regretted his openness. Now he would have liked to say, "That's none of your business." But he held back and swallowed it down. Finally, he said hesitantly, "There's only one way. If you don't want to or can't, I'll have to go to my mother and tell her everything. You know how much that will hurt her. It will also be difficult for her to come up with the money right away, although she will certainly do so. I could perhaps

go to a moneylender, but I wanted to ask at home first." His brother-in-law stood up and nodded thoughtfully a few times.

"Yes," he said hesitantly, "I'll give you the money, of course, at the usual interest rate. You can sign the note at the office later. I can't give you any advice, can I? I'm sorry that things have turned out this way for you. Would you like to stay for tea later?"

Erwin thanked him awkwardly but did not accept the invitation. He wanted to leave before evening. That seemed to be the wisest thing to do to his brother-in-law as well.

"Yes, as you wish," he said. "You can take the bill of exchange with you right away."

The philosophical "Paraphrases on the Law of Conservation of Energy" had been written in accordance with the original ideas, but no longer gave their author any real pleasure. Hans Calwer was already strongly influenced by the peasant thinker Wirth, whose approach to problems was more one-sided, but far more accurate and logical than his own. He had thought of reading his manuscript to him, but immediately abandoned the idea, because he knew full well that Wirth would find his work aesthetic and useless. And gradually he began to feel the same way himself. He found it too focused on interesting topics, almost like a newspaper feature, and too complacent in style. He did not want to destroy the carefully written pages he had just reread

, but he rolled them up, tied them together and put them in a corner of a cupboard so that he would not see them again so soon.

It was evening. Reading and painful self-criticism had agitated him and ultimately made him sad. For he realised that he was not yet ready to achieve anything truly worthwhile, and yet he was plagued by the urge to express himself secretly and to give his meditations and ideas a final, careful form. As a schoolboy, he had written poems and essays and once or twice a year reviewed and destroyed everything, while his desire to achieve something more lasting became ever more urgent. He threw his smoked-out cigarette into the stove, stood at the window for a while, letting in the winter air, and finally went to the piano. For a while he played tentatively, fantasising. Then, after a moment's thought, he picked up Beethoven's Twenty-Third Sonata and played it through with growing care and intensity. When he was finished and was still sitting bent over the piano stool, there was a knock at the door. He got up and opened it. Erwin

Mühletal came in.

"Erwin?" Hans exclaimed, surprised and somewhat embarrassed.

"Yes, may I?"

"Of course. Come in!"

He held out his hand to him.

They both sat down at the table, by lamplight, and now Hans saw that the familiar face had changed and become strangely older. "How are you?" he asked, trying to find a way to start the conversation. Erwin looked at him and smiled.

"Well, so-so. I don't know if you're happy to see me, but I wanted to give it a try. I wanted to tell you a little something and maybe ask you for a favour."

Hans listened to the familiar voice and was surprised at how good it made him feel and how much lost, hardly missed comfort it brought him. He offered his hand again across the table.

"That's very kind of you," he said warmly. "We haven't seen each other for so long. Actually, I should perhaps have come to see you, I had hurt you. Well, now you're here. Have a cigarette."

"Thank you. It's cosy here. You have a piano again. And still the same good cigarettes. – Were you angry with me?"

"Oh, angry! God knows how that happened. That stupid connection – yes, I'm sorry!"

"Go ahead. I won't be staying much longer anyway."

"Do you think so? But not because of me? Of course, I'm sure I caused you a lot of unpleasantness. Didn't I?"

"That too, but that's long past. If you have time, I'll tell you my *res gestae*."

"Please do. And don't spare my feelings."

"Oh, you hardly feature in it at all, even though I was thinking of you the whole time. I should have left with you back then. You were a bit curt in those days, and I was defiant and didn't want to go through thick and thin with you. Well, you already know that."

I haven't been doing well since then, and it was my own fault."

He began to tell his story, and to Hans's astonishment and horror, he heard what had happened to his friend while he had thought little of him and managed well without him.

"I don't really know how it happened," he heard him say. "Actually, things like that aren't really my style. But I wasn't quite myself back then. I was always walking around in a slight daze and let things take their course. And now comes the main chapter. It takes place in the Café zum Blauen Husaren, which you probably didn't know existed."

And now came the story about Miss Elvira. It seemed so sad and yet so ridiculous to Hans that Erwin had to laugh at his expression.

"And now what?" Hans asked at the end. "Of course you need money. But where will you get it? Mine is available, but it's not enough."

"Thank you, the money is already there," said Erwin cheerfully, and then told Hans why he thought his brother-in-law was a decent bloke.

"But how can I help you?" he then asked. "You mentioned something about that."

"Yes, indeed. You can do me a big favour. Namely, if you could go there tomorrow morning and pay that stupid bill for me."

"Hmm, yes, of course I can do that. I just wonder if you shouldn't do it yourself. It would be

a small triumph for you and an impeccable departure."

"That's true, Hans. But I think I'll pass. It's not cowardice, I'm quite sure of that, but simply a reluctance to see that place and the whole alley again. And then I thought, if you go there, you'll see the milieu for yourself, as an illustration to my report, and then we'll have a shared memory of this time and of the 'Blue Hussars'."

That made sense to Hans, and he accepted the assignment with considerable curiosity. When Erwin took out the banknotes and gold coins and counted them on the table, Hans exclaimed with a laugh, "Good heavens, that's a lot of money!" And he added seriously, "You know, it's actually a shame and foolish to pay all that. Elvira has surely charged you three times as much and will be happy and make a good deal if she gets half of it. Such sinful money! That's not right. I can take a policeman with me, just in case." But Erwin didn't want to hear any of it.

"You may be right," he said calmly, "and besides, I've already thought about it. But I don't want to. She should have her money, and if she gets it in full with interest, I'll have my freedom back. And even though it's completely over now, I was in love with her for a while."

"Oh, delusion!" Hans raged.

"So be it. I was. And I want her

to think of me as a fool and a decent fellow, but not as one of her own kind."

"Well then," Hans admitted, "a quixotic endeavour is always the most noble thing to do. It's foolish of you, but fine. So I'll take care of it tomorrow. I'll let you know how it goes." They parted cheerfully, and Hans was glad to be able to do something for his friend and thus repay a small

part of his debt. The next morning, he went to the "Blauen Husaren," where Elvira received him only after keeping him waiting for a long time and with great mistrust. He made an uncertain attempt to confront her about the unfairness of her manoeuvre, but immediately gave up in the face of her magnificent demeanour and contented himself with handing her the money for the sin and demanding a receipt, which he received and, for safety's sake, also had Elvira's mother sign. With this document, he went to Erwin, who took it from him with a sigh of relief and a laugh.

"May I ask you something else?" Erwin began, somewhat awkwardly.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Who is the student who sometimes visited you in the evenings and to whom you played Tristan?"

Hans was embarrassed and touched to see that Erwin was so concerned about his life and had even listened outside his window.

"His name is Heinrich Wirth," he said slowly, "perhaps you'll get to know him too."

"Have you become friends?"

"A little, yes. I knew him from college. He's an important person."

"Really? Well, maybe I'll see him at your place sometime. Or would that bother you?"

"What do you think! I'm glad you're coming back to me."

Secretly, however, it did bother him a little. There had been a slight tone of jealousy in Erwin's question, which he didn't like, because he had no intention of allowing Erwin to influence his relationship with Wirth. But he didn't say so, and his joy at the reconciliation was genuine enough not to cause him any concern for the time being.

A quiet period now ensued, especially for Erwin, who walked around with the happiness of someone who had recovered and now viewed his comrades and their demands on him more leniently and fairly. He believed that his renewed association with Calwer had not gone unnoticed by his fraternity brothers, and was pleased that they did not confront him about it. This made him all the more eager to fulfil his duties. He never missed a meeting, rejoined his valet in a friendly manner, joined in the drinking sessions of the older students, and since he did all this without ever showing annoyance or boredom, but with good humour and goodwill, people soon found him sufficiently reformed and treated him with renewed friendliness. This made him feel good; he regained his balance and sense of humour, and it wasn't long before society was quite satisfied with him and he with himself.

Leaving no longer seemed necessary to him; at any rate, he was no longer in a hurry to do so.

Hans also felt comfortable with this. Erwin visited him two or three times a week, and although he had become more independent and showed no sign of returning to his old dependence, Hans himself remained freer and found the more relaxed relationship pleasant.

Towards the end of the semester, Erwin came to see him and began to talk about his fraternity life. He said that now was the time to either leave, which he could do with all honours, or to remain a fraternity student of his own free will, as he was now going to be promoted to a senior member.

And when Hans smiled and told him that he thought the colours suited him well and advised him to continue wearing them, he exclaimed animatedly: "You're right! Look, if you had said a word, I would have left immediately; I still prefer you to all the fuss there. But I do enjoy it, and now that I've endured the initiation period, it would be stupid to leave just when the fun is really starting. So if you don't mind, I'll stay."

So the old inseparability was gone, but there were no more misunderstandings, quarrels and storms; the passionate relationship of the past had become peaceful, comfortable and a little more superficial. They accepted each other, no longer discussed everything together, allowed each other peace and quiet, and yet when they were together, they felt that they belonged to each other.

Erwin had initially expected a little more, but the lively camaraderie in the fraternity compensated for some of what he missed, and an unconscious pride within him regarded his gradual liberation from Hansen's influence as progress. And Hans was all the more satisfied with this state of affairs because Heinrich Wirth was causing him more and more trouble.

Shortly before the end of the semester, Erwin met Wirth one evening in Hansen's flat. He looked closely at the man he was jealous of, and although the latter was friendly towards him, he did not particularly like him. He was bothered by the appearance of the rustic sage, who impressed him little with his unyouthful dignity and vegetarian lifestyle, which Hans noticed with some annoyance. He even tried to tease the stranger a little and talked with exaggerated interest about student matters. And since Wirth listened to him patiently and even encouraged him with questions, he moved on to other topics and began to talk about abstinence and vegetarianism.

"What advantages do you actually gain from this ascetic lifestyle?" he asked. "Others drink and eat well and have no complaints."

Wirth laughed good-naturedly. "Well, then, keep on drinking! The ailments will come later. But there would already be advantages for you if you lived differently."

"Such as? Do you mean that I could save a lot of money? That doesn't interest me much."

"Why should I? But I'm thinking of other things. For example, I've been living in my own way, which you call ascetic, for three years now, and I hardly feel any need for women. I used to suffer a lot from this, and I think all students do. What they gain in health and stamina through riding and fencing, they lose again in the pub, and I think that's a shame."

Erwin became a little embarrassed and refrained from continuing the argument. He just said, "You'd think we were all cripples. I don't think much of a health that you have to think about all the time. Young people should be able to tolerate a little."

Hans ended the conversation by opening the piano.

"What shall I play?" he asked Wirth.

"Oh, I don't know anything about music, unfortunately. But if you would be so kind, I would very much like to hear the sonata from the other day again."

Hans nodded and opened a volume of Beethoven. As he played, occasionally looking up and seeking Wirth's gaze, Erwin could see that he was playing for him alone, courting him with his music. He saw it and envied the farmer's son for it. But when the playing was over and conversation resumed, he was polite and modest. He saw that this man had gained power over his friend, and he also saw that if Hans had to choose, he would choose him, not the other man. He did not want to leave it up to that choice.

The influence that Wirth exerted on Hans did not seem good to him. It seemed to him that he was pulling his friend even further over to the other side, to which he was already leaning too much, into a brooding and eccentricity that was half ridiculous and half eerie to him. Hans had always been something of a dreamer and thinker, but he had always been a lively, elegant fellow who was incapable of anything ridiculous. Now, however, Erwin felt that Wirth was corrupting him and deliberately turning him into a couch potato and a brooding intellectual.

Wirth remained quite harmless, while Hans sensed the mood and became annoyed with Erwin. He let him know it and, in conversation with him, fell back into the old superior tone that Erwin could no longer bear, so that he took his leave early and left irritably.

"Why were you so rude to your friend?" Wirth said reproachfully afterwards. "I liked him."

"Really? I found him unbearable today. Why does he have to tease you so stupidly?"

"It wasn't that bad. I can take a joke. If it had annoyed me, I would have been the stupid one."

"It wasn't about you at all, it was about me. He thinks I shouldn't socialise with anyone but him. Yet he spends all day hanging out with twenty fraternity brothers."

"But man, you're really upset! You should stop doing that, at least with your friends. Your friend felt uncomfortable not finding you alone, and he

let us know that a little. But otherwise I find him nice and amiable; I'd like to get to know him better."

"Let's leave it at that. I'll accompany you a little further, if I may."

They walked down the dark alley, through the town, which echoed here and there with choral singing, and slowly out into the open field, where the mild, starless March night blew softly. Here and there, a narrow strip of snow still shimmered with a pale glow from the northern hillsides. The air blew softly and casually through the bare bushes, the distance lay black in the impenetrable night. Heinrich Wirth strode along calmly and vigorously as always; Hans walked excitedly beside him, often changing his pace, sometimes stopping and looking into the bluish darkness of the night.

"You're restless," said Wirth. "Let go of your little annoyance!"

"That's not why." Wirth
did not reply.

They walked on in silence for a short while. Far away, dogs barked in a farmstead. A blackbird sang in the nearest bushes.

Wirth raised his finger: "Do you hear that?"

Hans just nodded and quickened his pace. Then he suddenly stopped.

"Mr Wirth, what do you actually think of me?"

"I can't tell you that."

"I mean – don't you want to be my friend?"

"I think I am."

"Not quite yet. Oh, I think I need you, I need a guide and a comrade. Can't you understand that?"

"I can. You want something different from the others; you are looking for a way, and you think I might know the right one. But I don't know it, and I believe everyone has to find their own. If I can help you with that, then fine! Then you'll just have to walk my path for a while. It's not yours, and I don't think it will be for long."

"Who knows? But how am I supposed to start walking your path? Where does it lead? How do I find it?"

"That's easy. Live as I live, it will do you good."

"How?"

"Try to spend a lot of time outdoors, working outside if possible. I know where you can do that. Also, don't eat meat, don't drink alcohol, don't drink coffee or tea, and don't smoke anymore. Live on bread, milk and fruit. That's the beginning."

"So I should become a complete vegetarian? And why?"

"So that you can break the habit of constantly asking 'why'. When you live sensibly, many things that previously seemed problematic become self-evident."

"Do you think so? That may be true. But I think practice should be the result of reflection, not the other way around. Once I understand what this life is good for, I can try it. But just like that, out of the blue..."

"Yes, that's your business. You asked me for advice, and I gave you my advice, the only one I know. You wanted to start thinking and stop living; I do the opposite. That's the path I was talking about."

"And if I don't take it, you don't want to be my friend?"

"It won't work. We can still talk and philosophise together, it's a pleasant exercise. I don't want to convert you. But if you want to be my friend, I have to be able to take you seriously."

They continued on their way. Hans was confused and disappointed. Instead of warm encouragement, instead of heartfelt friendship, he was offered a kind of naturopathic prescription that seemed trivial and almost ridiculous to him. "Stop eating meat, and I'll be your friend." But when he thought back to his earlier conversations with Wirth and his whole demeanour, whose seriousness and confidence had attracted him so powerfully, he couldn't consider him to be merely an apostle of Tolstoy or vegetarianism.

Despite his disillusionment, he began to consider Wirth's suggestion and thought about how abandoned he would be if this one person, who attracted him and from whom he expected encouragement, left him alone.

They had walked a long way and were already standing in front of the first houses of Blaubachhausen when Hans shook his friend's hand and said, "I'll try your advice."

Hans began his new life the very next morning. He did it more to show his compliance with Wirth than out of conviction, and it was less easy for him than he had thought.

"Mrs Ströhle," he said to his landlady in the morning, "I'm not drinking coffee anymore. Please get me a litre of milk every day."

"Are you ill?" asked Mrs Ströhle in surprise.

"Not exactly, but milk is healthier."

Silently, she did as he wished, but she didn't like it. She could see that her landlord had a screw loose. All that reading by such a young student, playing the piano alone, leaving such a distinguished society, associating with that shabby-looking philologist, and now drinking milk – it wasn't right. At first she had been pleased to have such a quiet and modest tenant, but this was going too far, and she would have preferred him to come home drunk like the others from time to time and sleep it off on the stairs. From then on, she watched him with suspicion, and what she saw did not please her at all. She noticed that he no longer went to the inn to eat, but instead brought home bashful packages every day, and when she looked inside, she found a table drawer full of bread crusts, nuts, apples, oranges and dried plums.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed at this discovery, and her respect for Hans Calwer was gone. He was either crazy or no longer getting any change. And when he

a few days later that he would be moving apartments next semester, she shrugged her shoulders and said only, "As you wish, Mr Calwer."

In the meantime, Hans had rented a farmhouse in Blaubachhausen, close to Wirth's, which he planned to move into after the holidays.

He didn't mind drinking milk and eating fruit, but this lifestyle made him feel like he was being forced into a role. However, he sorely missed his cigarettes, and at least once a day there came a moment when, despite everything, he lit one up and smoked it by the open window with a guilty conscience. After a few days, however, he felt ashamed of this and gave away all his cigarettes, a large box full, to a delivery man who had brought him a magazine.

While Hans spent his days in this way and was not too cheerful, Erwin never showed himself. He had been in a bad mood since that evening and did not want to meet Wirth again. In addition, with the holidays due to start in a week, he was very busy, as he was now being treated as a promising young man and was preparing to move from being a freshman to the ranks of the respected and influential.

So it happened that he did not visit Hans again until the last day before his departure. He found him packing and saw at once that he did not intend to keep the flat, as the piano had been removed and the pictures taken off the walls.

"Are you moving out?" he exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes. Have a seat!"

"Have you found a new place yet? – Yes? Where?"

"Outside the city, for the summer."

"So – and where?"

"In Blaubachhausen."

Erwin jumped up. "Really? No, you're joking." Hans shook his head.

"Seriously?"

"Yes, indeed."

"To Blaubachhausen! To the innkeeper's, right? To the kohlrabi eater. Listen, be smart and don't do it."

"I've already rented a place and I'm moving out. What's it got to do with you?"

"But Hans! Let him chase his dreams! You need to think this over. Got a cigarette?"

"No, I don't smoke anymore."

"Aha. So that's why! And now you're moving out to the forest man and becoming his disciple? You've become modest, I must say."

Hans had been dreading the moment when he would have to tell Erwin about his decision. Now his anger helped him overcome his embarrassment.

"Thanks for your kind opinion," he said coolly, "I could have guessed that. By the way, I'm not used to taking advice from you."

Erwin became vexed. "No, unfortunately not. Then do your foolish things alone!"

"With pleasure."

"I mean it. If you live out there with your sleazy saint, I can never be seen near you again."

"That's not necessary. Just go to your Couleur monkeys."

Erwin had had enough. He could have hit Hans if he hadn't still felt a little sorry for him. Without saying goodbye, he ran out, slammed the door behind him and was gone. Hans didn't call him back, even though his agitation was already subsiding.

He had devoted himself to conquering this stubborn, quiet landlord through submission; now he had to persevere and stick with it. In his heart, he understood Erwin very well; this discipleship seemed almost ridiculous to him. But he wanted to take this arduous path; he wanted to surrender his will and renounce his freedom, to serve from below for once. Perhaps this was the path he had been missing; perhaps this was the narrow bridge that led to knowledge and contentment. Just as he had once joined a society that did not suit him in a moment of intoxication, so now weakness and dissatisfaction drove him to seek support and community once more.

Incidentally, he was convinced that Erwin would come back to him after sulking for a while.

Of course, he was mistaken. After what Erwin had gone through because of him in the time since he left, he would have had to bind him more firmly to himself in order to keep him forever. Erwin had promised Hans he would return.

return to Hans. And besides, he had learned a few things at the "Blauer Husar", at his brother-in-law's office and especially from his fraternity brothers, which Hans had no idea about and which had brought down Hansen's former unconditional rule over him. Despite all his youthful follies, he had quietly become a man, and without even realising it, he had overcome Hansen's former superiority and learned to see that his admired friend, for all his wit, was not a hero after all.

In short, Erwin did not take the new break with him too much to heart. He was sorry, and he did not feel entirely blameless, but deep down he thought Hansen deserved it, and soon he stopped thinking about it altogether. Other things were now occupying his mind.

When he came home for the Easter holidays, pleasantly tired from the foundation festival and the after-parties, he made a very good impression on his mother and sisters in his new bachelor splendour.

He was content, radiant, amiable and witty, paying visits in a fine new summer suit, playing dominoes with his mother and bringing flowers for his sisters, winning the hearts of his aunts by doing them small favours and striving in every way to be pleasantly impeccable.

There was a good reason for this. Erwin Mühletal had fallen in love on the very first day of the holidays. A young girl, a friend of his cousins, was visiting his uncle. She was pretty, lively, playful, played tennis,

sang, talked about the theatres in Berlin and, although she liked him very much, did not allow herself to be impressed in the slightest by the young student. This made him try even harder, exhausting himself with kindness and zeal until the proud girl finally relented and he was able to crown his wonderful holidays with a secret engagement.

There was never any mention of Hans. When Erwin's mother asked about him once, he replied briefly: "The Calwer! Oh, he's not very bright. The latest news is that he's joined the teetotallers and is living with an eccentric who is a Buddhist or theosophist or something like that and only has his hair cut once a year."

The summer semester got off to a splendid start. The gardens were in bloom, filling the whole city with the sweet scent of lilacs and jasmine; the days were bright blue and the nights already summery and mild. Colourful groups of students strutted through the streets, riding horses, driving carriages and walking their green wedge foxes. At night, singing drifted from open windows and gardens.

Hans saw little of this joyful life. He had moved into Blaubachhausen, went to the city every morning with Heinrich Wirth to attend a Sanskrit class, dipped bread in his milk at lunchtime, went for walks or tried to help with farm work, and fell into his hard straw bed every evening, exhausted, without sleeping well.

His friend did not make it easy for him. He still only half believed in his sincerity and had decided

to put him through a rough school. Without ever losing his cheerful composure and without ever giving orders, he forced him to live according to his own way in everything. He read the Upanishads of the Vedas with him, practised Sanskrit with him, taught him to take a scythe in his hands and cut grass. If Hans was tired or angry, he shrugged his shoulders and left him alone. If Hans began to argue about this life, he smiled and remained silent, even when Hans became angry and insulting.

"I'm sorry," he said once, "that you find it so difficult. But until you have experienced the hardships of life for yourself and learned to understand what independence from the pleasures and attractions of external life means, you cannot move forward. You are following the same path that Buddha followed and that everyone who was serious about knowledge has followed. Asceticism itself is worthless and has never made anyone a saint, but it is necessary as a preliminary stage. The ancient Indians, whose wisdom we revere and whose books and teachings Europe now wishes to return to, were able to fast for forty days or more. Only when physical needs have been completely overcome and become secondary can a serious spiritual life begin. You should not become an Indian penitent, but you should learn equanimity, without which pure contemplation is not possible."

It was not uncommon for Hans to be so exhausted and upset that it was impossible for him to go to work or even be with Heinrich. Then he would walk behind his house across the meadows to a pasture hill, where

A few broad-branched pines provided shade, and he threw himself down on the grass and lay there for hours. He heard the sounds of farm work drifting over, the bright, sharp clanging of scythes and the soft cutting of grass, heard dogs barking and small children screaming, and occasionally students driving through the village in cars and singing loudly. And he listened patiently and wearily and envied them all, the farmers, the children, the dogs, the students. He envied the grass for its quiet growth and easy death, the birds for their soaring, the wind for its leisurely flight. How easily and naturally they all lived, as if life were a pleasure!

Sometimes a wistfully beautiful dream haunted him – those were his best days. Then he thought of the evenings he had spent in the professor's house and of his beautiful, quiet wife, whose image lived in him, delicate and longing, and then it seemed to him that a serious, true life was lived in that house, with necessary, meaningful sacrifices and suffering, while he himself created artificial suffering and sacrifices without need in order to come closer to the meaning of life.

These thoughts came and went with the wind, dreamlike and unwanted. As soon as the fatigue and mental calm subsided, Heinrich Wirth stood once more at the centre of his thoughts, his calm, silently commanding gaze fixed questioningly upon him. He could not escape this man, even though he might sometimes wish to do so.

For a long time, he hid from himself the fact that he had expected something different from Wirth and was disappointed. The spartan food, the field work, the renunciation of all comforts hurt him, but would not have disillusioned him so quickly. What he missed most were the quiet evenings at the piano, the long, comfortable days spent reading, and the twilight hours with a cigarette. It seemed years since he had last heard good music, and sometimes he would have given anything to sit for an hour, fresh and well-dressed, among refined people. He could easily have had that; he only had to go into town and visit the professor, for example. But he did not want to and could not. He did not want to snack on what he had solemnly renounced. Besides, he was constantly tired and listless; the unfamiliar life did him no good, just as any drastic cure does no good if it is not undertaken of one's own accord and out of inner necessity.

What hurt him most was that his master and friend regarded all his efforts with quiet irony. He never mocked him, but he watched and remained silent, seeming to realise that Hans was on the wrong path and tormenting himself needlessly.

After two hot, sour months, the situation became unbearable. Hans had given up reasoning and remained sullenly silent. He had not been going to work for several days, but instead, when he returned from college around noon, he lay on his lawn for the rest of the day, idle and hopeless. Wirth decided it was time to put an end to it.

One morning, Wirth, who was always up early, appeared at Hans's bedside, sat down next to him and looked at him with his quiet smile.

"Well, Hans?"

"What is it? Is it time for college already?"

"No, it's barely five o'clock. I wanted to chat with you a bit. Does that bother you?"

"Actually, yes, at this time of day. I haven't slept much. What's going on?"

"Nothing. Let's just talk for a bit. Tell me, are you actually satisfied now?"

"No, not at all."

"I can tell. I think the best thing for you right now would be to rent a nice room in town, with a piano --"

"Oh, stop joking!"

"I know you're not in the mood for jokes. Neither am I. I'm serious. Look, you wanted to follow in my footsteps, and I have to say, you've made things difficult for yourself. But it's not working, and I think you should put an end to the torment, don't you? You've dug your heels in and staked your honour on not giving up, but there's no point anymore."

"Yes, I think so too. It was a stupid thing to do, and it cost me a beautiful summer. And you stood by and enjoyed it. Oh, you hero! And now that you've had enough and are getting bored, you graciously wave me away and send me off again."

"Don't grumble, Hans! It may seem that way to you, but you know that things are always different from how they appear to us. I thought it would work out that way, but I didn't enjoy it. I meant well and I think you learned something from it."

"Oh yes, I've learnt enough."

"Don't forget that it was your decision. Why shouldn't I let you do it, as long as it didn't seem dangerous? But now it's enough. I think we can both still take responsibility for what we've done so far."

"And now what?"

"You must know that. I had hoped that you might perhaps make my life your own. That has not happened – what was voluntary for me is a sad compulsion for you, one that is corrupting you. I do not mean to say that your will was not strong enough, although I believe in free will. You are different from me, you are weaker, but also more refined; things that are luxuries for me are necessities for you. If, for example, your music had been mere imagination or pretence, you would not miss it so much now."

"Pretentious! You think kindly of me."

"Forgive me! I didn't mean it in a bad way. Let's say self-deception instead. That's how it was with your philosophical thoughts. You were dissatisfied with yourself, you abused and tyrannised your friend, that good fellow. You tried it with the red cap, then with Buddhist studies, and finally with me. But you never quite managed to sacrifice yourself. You tried hard to do it, but it didn't work. You sacrificed yourself

still too dear. Allow me to say everything! You believed you were in great distress and were prepared to do anything to find peace. But you could not give yourself up, and perhaps you never will be able to. You tried to make the greatest sacrifice because you saw that it made me happy. You wanted to follow my path and did not know that it leads to nirvana. You wanted to enhance and elevate your personal life, but I could not help you with that because my goal is to no longer have a personal life and to merge with the whole. I am the opposite of you and cannot teach you anything. Think of it as if you had entered a monastery and been disappointed.

"You're right, it's something like that."

"That's why you're going out again now and seeking your salvation elsewhere. It was just a detour."

"And the goal?"

"The goal is peace. Perhaps you are strong and artistic enough – then you will learn to love your inadequacies and draw life from them. I cannot do that. Or, who knows, if you do manage to sacrifice yourself completely and give yourself away, then you will be back on my path, whether you call it asceticism, Buddha, Jesus, Tolstoy or something else. It is always open to you."

"Thank you, Heinrich, you mean well. Just tell me one more thing: how do you see your life continuing? Where does your path ultimately lead?"

"I hope it leads to peace. I hope it leads to me one day being able to rejoice in my consciousness and yet rest carefree in God's hands like a bird

and a plant. If I can, I will one day share my life and knowledge with others, but otherwise I seek nothing more than to overcome death and fear for myself. I can only do that if I no longer feel my life as something separate and isolated; only then will every moment of my life have meaning."

"That is a lot."

"That is everything. That is the only thing worth wishing for and living for."

In the evening of the next day, there was a knock at Erwin's door. He called out and thought it was a fraternity brother he was expecting. When he turned around, Hans was standing in front of him. He looked at him awkwardly and surprised. "You?"

"Yes, sorry! I don't want to disturb you. We parted without saying goodbye last time."

"Yes, I know. Well..."

"I'm sorry, it was my fault. Are you still angry with me?"

"Oh no. But excuse me, I'm expecting a visitor..."

"Just a moment! I'm leaving tomorrow; I'm a bit ill, and I definitely won't be coming back here next summer."

"That's a shame. What's wrong with you? Nothing serious, I hope?"

"No, just minor things. I just wanted to hear how you were doing. Fine, right?"

"Oh yes. But you don't know..."

"What?"

"I'm engaged, since spring. It hasn't been public yet, but next week I'm going

to Berlin for the engagement party. My bride is from Berlin."

"Congratulations. You're a lucky guy! Now you'll really knuckle down to your medicine."

"It's going well. But from next semester onwards, I'll be working hard. And what do you have in mind?"

"Maybe Leipzig. But I'm disturbing you, aren't I?"

"Well, if you don't mind – I'm expecting a fraternity brother. You understand, it would be embarrassing for you too – –"

"Oh, right! I hadn't thought of that. Well, by the time we meet again, these stories will probably be forgotten. Farewell, Erwin!"

"Goodbye, Hans, and no hard feelings! It was nice of you to come. Will you write to me sometime? Thank you. And have a safe journey!"

Hans went downstairs. He wanted to pay a farewell visit to the professor with whom he had had a long conversation yesterday. Outside, he looked up at Erwin's window once more.

As he walked away, he thought of the hard-working farmers, the village children, the fraternity with their brick-red caps, Erwin and all the lucky ones whose days slip through their fingers easily and without regret, and then of Heinrich Wirth and himself and all those who struggle with life and whom he welcomed into his heart as his friends and brothers.

(1907/1908)