

German Short Stories of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries
Edmund Hoefler (1819-1882)

Tales of an Old Drummer

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- I. **Anno Ninety-Two** (p. 2)
- II. **Of the Great Beard** (p. 16)
- III. **Rolof the Recruit** (p. 51)
- IV. **The Revolt** (p. 96)
- V. **The Old Captain**

I. Anno Ninety-Two

It is wild and frightening weather. The snow, mixed with rain, strikes and slaps against the dim, sweating windows; the gale passes over the broad square in front of the guard-house in long gusts and whistles, and howls in the jagged gables and pinnacles of the old buildings opposite. Every now and then, the muffled sound of the sentry-at-arms' footsteps is heard through the wild roars.

Two lean, gloomily burning tallow candles cast a meagre light on the dirty walls of the large guardroom, and their flames shimmer dimly in the shining barrels of the muskets, which have been brought in for protection from the weather and hung up on the wall.

It is not noisy in the room. Those who are next to mount guard lie wrapped in their coats, sleeping, or, at any rate, silent on their plank beds; the corporal has nodded off before his guard-book; others sit smoking in silence at the dirty, plain table and eagerly shift the colourful cards in their hands; yet others have arrayed themselves around the immense stove, in which a bright, crackling fire is burning; they have moved a few benches and a small table up there. On the table there is a bowl of punch, already emptied to quite a depth; for a volunteer who is standing guard for the first time has stood the men the customary treat. The old soldiers sit there, the seasoned drinkers, and smoke their short pipes and drink their glasses of hot grog, quite at their leisure. Meanwhile, the hour strikes. The sentry calls out, the guard follows slowly and sleepily. The changing is quickly accomplished and men hurry back in to their old places. And after those

relieved have shaken the snow from their coats and warmed their frozen hands, the calm of earlier soon settles in once more.

“But, Ralow,” the volunteer said to the old drummer as he sat down, shuddering, near the stove, “but Ralow, pray tell me if it’s because you like this way of life so much, that you’re still in the regiment and spurn your discharge? You must number some sixty years.” “I’m seventy-one, young Sir,” the old man replied, nestling back against the wall and blowing thick clouds of smoke out from his old, black burl wood pipe. “Yes, that’s how old I am! And do I like life under the colours, you ask? Hang it, what else could I do? Perhaps, as a poor invalid, earn my bread with a barrel-organ or make bird-cages? No way! And besides, I’m not an invalid yet, but healthy and strong like one of the young chaps. Yes, they’ve twice wanted to discharge me, but I asked to stay, and so I have.”

“You could return home, you know,” the other said, “could live a quiet life with your relatives and not need to torment yourself in the service, which I’ve had quite a bellyful of these past four weeks.”

“I believe it! I believe it!” the drummer replied, joining in the general laughter. “But if you had been under the colours for fifty-five years like me, then it would be different. Service, you say? Bah! You would have to have come forty, fifty years ago, to understand what service is. And I go home? Good God! What would I do there? I don’t have a father or mother, nor a sister or a brother, nor a wife or a child! I don’t even know if the smoky roof of the old hut where I was born is still standing. No, the colours are my home, wife, and child, and I don’t give a damn for the rest.”

The old man is uncommonly talkative. What could have put him in

this mood? The drink? Hardly; he is an old fellow who is not exactly stimulated and amused by half a night spent drinking. Usually, he tends to quietly keep to himself and curse the noise his cheerful young comrades make. Today it is different. Perhaps his spirits have been raised by the young treat-stander coming from his hometown, by having known his grandparents. A good-natured smile plays around his mouth and his still fiery blue eyes, which are overshadowed by long and shaggy white eyebrows. He feels uncommonly comfortable in the corner by the stove before the crackling fire, with his full glass and his pipe of superior tobacco.

“You know what, Father Ralow?” said the corporal, “You should tell us a tale of former days in your soldier’s life. That will help us to pass the time; for we may not sleep, as Captain B. is the officer du jour.”¹ The old man grew serious. “Nothing doing!” he replied. “What would there be to tell, anyway? Life ran its smooth course: garrison and war, and war and garrison.”

“The corporal is right,” said the volunteer, “tell us all the same. You must have encountered something remarkable here and there in so long a time. Talk about the time before Jena, about service, about war, whatever you want, it’s sure to be fine by us. And now that the water is boiling, I’ll make us another bowl of punch. Then we’ll move up closer and you can tell your tale.”

The old man laughed. “Well may you flatter,” he said, “what should I tell you?” The others added their persuasions, the hot drink was ready, and

¹ The officer of the day.

everyone filled their glass and moved up. “All right,” said the drummer, “I’m supposed to tell a tale, and so I must. But one more thing! Hold your tongues, you lads, when I speak; I don’t like to say anything twice and I can’t stand questions.” After speaking thus, he began.

“At the time, you boys, when I entered the service – I was sixteen years old and the year was 1786 – in those days, it was a different time and a different military profession. There were entirely different, smarter uniforms; then, we wore gaiters on our legs and shoes on our feet and not these big, fat boots. In those days, when you had done as much as is done today and had everything in order for parade, when there was not a speck of dust left on your uniform, and buttons, brass and belt were clean and shining, you still had to have your hair dressed and powdered and your queue plaited. In those days, it was not good words or a Christian oath which ruled, but the flat of a sword; then, there were rods and laths² and riding the wooden horse, and swearwords such as no Christian man would let pass his lips nowadays; the officers carried their stick for convenience or chastisement, according to need, and every corporal also. There was no talk of reserves and territorial army and first and second levees and all the like. The Canton walked through the land and tied his red thread around the necks of even the babies in the cradle.³

“Well then, they gave such a thread to me also and it still lies in my hymnbook as a marker. And because I had taken much pleasure in noble

² “Latten” – a prison for soldiers, in which the floor was nailed with triangular laths.

³ Between 1733 and 1813, Prussia had the ‘Canton System,’ in which the country was divided into recruiting districts called Cantons and every male child of the lower classes was enlisted as early as possible.

music from youth upwards, I believed, foolish lad that I was, that I could make something of myself through it, and so I left home a few years earlier and became a drummer in the regiment of M., which was in –g at that time. That's the same regiment which you are all in with me, for anno 1807 it received the number it now bears.

“Apart from our regiment and the Grenadier Battalion of O., there were the Dragoons of B. in the fortress at that time. We were such a smart corps as you won't find any more nowadays. There were steps and a tempo without faltering; no button was ever dull, no queue was a hair's-breadth longer than another. The dragoons weren't bad either, in their blue buff coats and yellow cuffs, and on their large Holstein horses; but at that time we were deadly enemies with them. How did that come about? Their Colonel and ours were a couple of good-hearted people who loved their regiments and treated their soldiers well, but they didn't like to set eyes on each other. For one day, while drinking, the conversation had turned to war, and they had argued about the usefulness of cavalry and infantry. Our Colonel said, only the infantry was any use, and the other said, only the cavalry was. Then one word led to another, and in the end our commander said, “I can capture an entrenchment with a battery in it with my regiment, and you can't do that.” “No,” the other said, mightily waspishly, “I can't do that, but in the open field I can make mincemeat of you.” “Like Hell you can!” our Colonel cried; “I wouldn't advise anyone to ever make the attempt on us!” And then there were even more heated words, and then they had to promise the General not to duel, and from that time on they hated each other's guts, and when the dragoon saw our leader walking

down the right-hand side of the market square to give the password, he walked on the left side, and they didn't give each other good day or good night. And we, as loyal soldiers who loved their commanders, could not stand each other, and wherever a brawl broke out, it was sure to be the Dragoons of B. and the Musketeers of M. who were at loggerheads. So we passed our time happily, hated the dragoons like the Devil, and loved our Colonel all the more as the Major of the Grenadiers was a real Satan, which made us realise what it meant to have good officers.

“But our joy didn't last long. I hadn't been in the fortress a year when our commander died and we were given a new Colonel who was a real firebrand from Hell. There was no muster without two or three men being beaten or sent to the laths; swearwords fell thick as hail, and my drum had to bear the roll-call for running the gauntlet often enough. At first, the dragoons laughed at us and mocked us; but we could soon have done so by them because their Colonel became a General and was transferred to Berlin, and they were given another one, who was, if possible, of an even crazier stamp than ours. It was the Herr von B., the grandfather of our Captain, who has inherited from him rigour and meticulousness in service at least. In short, the dragoons now had even more cause for complaint than we did, and so we became close friends again. And things went on in this way for several years.

“At that time, there was a certain Patow among the dragoons. His father was the pastor in my village. The young man had studied and had a good brain; he had fallen among wild companions, his father had renounced him, and in short, he joined the soldiery. I had often been in his

father's house, he knew me well and I him, and the two of us were actually the cause of our regiments becoming close friends again. His previous Colonel had mostly used him as a clerk, and as he was an exceedingly able and merry companion, the whole regiment loved him, and we others did no less. But when the new Colonel came, his writing stopped and he had to be on duty like the others – indeed, more than the others. And the more we loved him, the more his commander hated him, God knows for what reason. There was no arduous, no unpleasant duty he was not ordered to do, there was no mistake, however slight, that was not charged heavily to his account. And you know that when an officer wants to maltreat and punish a soldier, he very soon finds something punishable. But Patow bore himself well, and so did the regiment; the Colonel had nothing on them, and apart from a few small punishments for even smaller misdemeanours, nothing happened.

“Now it was the spring of 1792 and we were soon to set out on the campaign we would make in France that year. It was on a Sunday, and Patow was standing guard on the South Bastion, around two in the afternoon. The weather was marvellous, there was nothing to do, and seven or eight of us had walked out to that bastion because it gave a nice prospect of the river and the whole surrounding area, and we, who came from the sea, did like to have a little bit of water before our eyes.

“So we sat and loafed around there, completely at our leisure, when suddenly the Devil brought along both of our Colonels, who had presumably been sitting together as bosom friends and were now taking a walk for their digestion. We therefore jumped to our feet quick as lightning

and arranged ourselves. Patow presented arms, and the two of them stood in conversation not far from him.

“God knows what they were saying, but they were arguing, for they were flinging their arms around like the sails of a windmill, and the dragoon may have said or contended something ridiculous, because our chief laughed and Patow’s mouth also twisted up very slightly. Now that went to the dragoon’s head and conjugated with the wine there, and because he could not or would not vent his anger on the other, he rushed at Patow like a wounded boar and yelled, “Hell and bloody damnation, what’s the scoundrel laughing at?” “Begging your pardon, Colonel,” he replied, stiff and rigid as a puppet, “I am not laughing.” “What!” yelled the dragoon. “You dare to deny it, you infamous son of a –! Damn him to Hell!” – and he raised his stick.

“But Patow was a real man, who did not fear the Devil himself, and the Colonel all the less; he was hopping mad at the affront, and knew that nobody had any right to insult a sentry, so he looked his commander boldly and steadily in the eye. “Why is the fellow looking at me, the cur?” he yelled, and at the same time blows fell upon the sentry thick as hail. But he leaped back, raised his sabre and cried, “Colonel, respect the sentry, or I’ll do what I have to!” Ghastly pale, the Colonel sprang back and was totally silent at first. Our old man also stood there, not moving a hand, a foot, or his tongue, for everything had happened, stroke upon stroke, in less than a minute’s time. But suddenly the dragoon turned round, flew at us like a shell and shouted at us to arrest Patow.

“Now that was bad. He had, you know, no right at all to do that.

Besides, we were all without our muskets and bayonets, as you are when going for a walk. Our commander also tried to persuade him to calm down, to order a guard to be brought. But he wouldn't listen to anything, arrested Patow himself, made a dragoon among our number take his sabre and casque, and had Patow taken to the guardhouse between two of us.

“Now all Hell was let loose. On the next day, he came before the Court Martial, and some of them were ill-disposed enough towards him. But Patow spoke like the best advocate, and many of the assessors looked on him with favour; moreover, the Colonel had been hauled over the coals by the General for having infringed the rules, so our comrade came away with running the gauntlet four times and eight days in the laths, and this was only, they said, because he had had the effrontery to laugh at his commander. But that was bad enough for him. The lad had honour in his bones and he told me, when I was allowed to visit him on the evening before, that it would be the death of him, particularly as running the gauntlet was a very rare occurrence among the dragoons and this was the first instance in ten or more years. I tried to comfort him, as much as I could, but it was no use; he asked me to write to his father when he was dead. I represented to him that he'd get over the pain very soon, as his comrades and the corporals wished him well. “Fool!” he said, “do you think that I fear the pain? But the disgrace! The disgrace! – I'll choke on it!” Then he walked up and down in silence, grinding his teeth. “But if the Devil is going to have me,” he said at last, “there's no way he'll get me alone!” Ice-cold shivers ran down my spine, and in my mind I began to say the death-prayer for the Colonel, for I wouldn't have given three pennies for his life.”

The old man leaned back and fell silent. He refilled his pipe and took a hearty swig to refresh his dry throat. The guardsmen sat around, listening; nobody had the least grain of sleep in his eyes. It was deathly quiet in the room; one could have heard the beating of hearts. The drummer took one more drink, wiped his mighty, snow-white moustache with the back of his hand, leaned his upper body forwards, and resumed his tale.

“Well, on the next morning it happened. His squadron stood on the market-square and Patow walked through them, pale as a corpse and proud and upright as a drum-major. His comrades loved him, as I’ve said, and the corporals and sergeants turned a blind eye, the officers themselves were silent, and so the rods were snapped or split in an instant, and the blows rang out like resounding slaps but caused no pain. The Colonel saw this and was foaming with rage. “Thrash him! Thrash him!” he kept yelling; he would himself, I think, have taken a place in the row, had it only been possible. I can still see him, sitting there, fidgeting back and forth on his old grey horse and continually thundering out that damned, “Thrash him! Thrash him!” He had new rods given out and decreed arrest for any man who snapped his. But they snapped all the same. The execution was over, Patow went into the laths and the squadron received three extra guard-duties, for it was impossible to put them man by man into the hole.

“This affair was over, but this being the end of everything, nobody believed that. We all knew Patow, knew that he had previously said: that man was a dastardly cur who could bear such a public whipping, no matter

how deserved or just it be; and I knew, besides that, what I knew, but prudently held my tongue. But how we felt at that time, I'm hardly able to tell you. You may laugh at this, or not, but I had that feeling you get when it's really sultry and close outside and your mind becomes daft and dull, and the others had it too. I can't describe to you the fury at the Colonel. If anyone could have got him alone, he wouldn't have left that place alive. Perhaps he sensed this; he was always accompanied by his adjutants and orderlies. The officers also looked on him with no kindly eyes, for they had heard his cursed, "Thrash him, thrash him!" and never could forget it; and in the whole town, I believe, he had no friends, except for our Colonel, the Grenadier Major and his old grey mare.

"But that was a cursed beast, and if it's possible that the Black One can enter a living creature, he certainly sat in the grey mare. When the Colonel came riding up, surly and grumpy, certainly, but no more so than usual, when everything was in order and there was nothing to curse about, then the horse walked quietly and sleepily, press and drive it all he might, with ears half-lowered and eyes half-shut; but when the rider began to scold and to curse and to rage, then its ears rose, stiffly pricked up, the creature opened its eyes wide, and it lifted its legs and wagged its tail like a dog. And the worse he cursed and raged, the faster the damned docked tail wagged. I've never seen two creatures who were better suited to each other.

"Meanwhile, the eight days passed; Patow came out of the laths, and after he had lain in the lazaretto for a few days, he was as lively and healthy as ever; but he kept himself to himself and there was thunder on

his brow.

“Now the time for us to march out had come; other regiments had reached us to continue their march together with us. It was Sunday. We were to hold a church service in the open air, then a big parade before old Möllendorf,⁴ and leave the town on Monday. It feels like it was yesterday. It was the most delightful spring morning, the sun glittering, the trees sprouting, all creatures humming and merrily twittering. We were standing in a large hollow square, ready to march off to the right; at the front were the Dragoons of B. on the left wing, the Cuirassiers of H. were in the centre, the Hussars of R. on the right; opposite them, the Grenadiers of L. and the Fusiliers of O.; on the left, beside the Dragoons, were our regiment and the regiment of R.; opposite us on the right, beside the Hussars, the artillery and the Fusiliers of W. None of the generals were there yet; they were having breakfast with the commander of the fortress.

“Now, you know it’s customary, before departing on a campaign, to ask if anyone has any request or complaint to make, and although that’s actually for the generals, our colonels always inquired in advance, so that nothing of an unseemly nature or anything that might be disagreeable would come before the generals. And that’s what happened here. Our commander had asked, and all was in order. The other colonels and officers inspected their troops for the final time. Then old B. rode up to the front of the dragoons and said, “Well, does any of you scoundrels have something to say? – He may come forward!”

⁴ Wichard Joachim Heinrich von Möllendorf (1724-1816), Prussian Field Marshal.

“At first, all was still, but then Patow rode slowly up. The music corps and we drummers were standing on the extreme right wing of the regiment, very close to the dragoons, and the whole affair happened not fifty paces away from us.

“Up until then, the Colonel had kept perfectly still, neither man nor horse moving a muscle. But as soon as Patow came to a halt three paces from them, the Colonel’s hand twitched for his sabre, and his unholy grey beast threw its head up high and its tail went round like a spinning top, and we all felt our hair stand on end at these devilish capers; for in those days, we all still believed in the workings of Satan.

“So, they were stopped opposite one another, and looked each other in the eye, and were silent at first. “Well! Eh?” the Colonel finally yelled, “what does the swine want? Don’t you have a tongue?” “I only mean to report to you, Colonel, that I wish to complain to the General about the unfairness of my punishment.” “Eh? What d’you want?” said the Colonel, taken aback, for nobody had dared to do this in living memory, although it was allowed. “I also wish to complain,” the other replied in an icy voice, “because you have besmirched my honourable birth, even though it is purer and more honourable than yours.”

“Now you need to know that there was a musketeer from the Colonel’s estates among us; he had told us things about his – the Colonel’s – mother, a gallant lady, which justified Patow’s remark, or did not – no matter. But as soon as Patow had said those words, the Colonel turned as red as a glowing coal and screamed; “Sergeant! Sergeant! Come here with two men! Tear this dog from his horse and thrash him till

he can't get up!"

"The Sergeant of the First Squadron rode forward, but before he could cover ten paces, Patow tore his pistols out of their holster, shouted, "Now die, cur!" and shot the Colonel off his horse. Then there was a rush towards him from all sides, but Patow cried, "Make way!" and fired the second bullet into his head, spattering the faces of those nearest him with blood and brains.

"At the same time, the generals arrived, having heard the shots on the way, at full gallop. But it was all over. The Colonel was dead and Patow stirred no more. We buried the one in the churchyard with full honours and they covered the other with earth in the knacker's-yard at night.

"On Tuesday we set out and marched for France."

The old man fell silent, the others kept quiet for a long time. "And the grey beast – the mare?" a recruit shyly asked at length; the others laughed. "The grey," the drummer said in deadly earnest, "was taken by the Colonel's son, who was a lieutenant in the H-ian Cuirassiers at the time and was present at the affair. She was shot dead under him at Grandpré." "Thank God!" said the recruit, sighing from the depths of his heart, "so she wasn't able to bring any more such creatures into the world. Otherwise, I'd have thought the captain's bay was from her stock, for it wags its tail just like that."

Amidst the laughter of the guardsmen and even the drummer, the sentry called out: "Captain B. is here and will inspect the guard."

II. Of the Great Beard

It is spring; the windows of the guardroom stand open, the lime-trees surrounding the broad square are bursting merrily into leaf, and swallows are darting friskily through the clear skies. The sentry-at-arms stands near a window, carelessly leaning on his musket. Every now and again, his eyes and ears sweep over the market square on the qui vive for the approach of an officer to whom he must do the honours, but his attention repeatedly returns to the inside, where old Ralow is sitting in the centre of the men. It is not duty that has called the old man hither; his age and his rank, as First Drummer, free him from the usual service, but the Volunteer's requests have brought him here today. The man is the forefather of the regiment. It was formed in the year 1780, I think, and six years later the drummer entered it and, since that time, he has experienced everything with it – fortune and misfortune, peace and war.

But he comes only rarely, the old man, and they have got hold of him for the first time since the winter, and now they ask and urge him to tell them a tale like he did then. There he sits, as beforementioned, at the open window, and the rays of the sun gild his ice-grey head and the smoke which billows profusely from his indispensable pipe.

“So do you think,” he says at last, “one can shake tales out of one's head just at will, especially when there are no more there? And must what once aroused our curiosity and made us sit up and take notice, and galvanised us into action, necessarily have been a major event, a state event, that is still good to be told, and edifying to listen to, twenty and more years later? Now, I've certainly heard that there are people who can think

up a story just like that and, so to speak, conjugate a whole fence out of a branch, and now that I come to think of it, I knew such a Jack Pudding myself and listened to him often enough. But I'm none of that kind, and don't give a hangman's rope for fairy-tales and stories."

"You're wrong there," says the volunteer. "Don't we young ones need to know the virtuous deeds that those before us did, and the important events they lived through, so we can be prepared for similar cases, so we can admire them all the more and strive to emulate them? What's the good of experience if it doesn't make the younger generation cleverer and more virtuous?" "Emulate, become cleverer and more virtuous!" the drummer replies, shaking his head and laughing. "Bah! Emulate! Let me tell you, my good sir, that there's nothing in that at all. You can tell the coward and the knave as much as you want to, he'll run away all the same and not emulate a soul – and conversely, the good and upright man, even though he never hears anything in his lifetime about the great events of war and battles and other affairs, when things start to get heated, he'll still be there with a clear head and a stout heart. Our men in Anno Thirteen didn't give a thought in their sleep to what those before them had done, and yet they fought as well as the very best troops."

"Yes," the volunteer cries, "but that was a time that doesn't return in a century, a time whose heady scent filled not only heads, but hearts as well! And that's what makes it so unique, so more splendid than all others! This cordiality, this brotherly friendship between the most various nations, the beautiful trust between Princes and peoples – how great and splendid!"

"Yes," the drummer says, turning his mouth up in scorn, "that's all

very nice and good, if only it were true. Those are really marvellous words and they quickly warm the cockles of your heart. But that's the way it goes when you believe those who make books. I once read such a scribbling when I was lying in the lazaretto, and I couldn't believe my eyes, there was so much jabbering and twaddle in it. Oh yes – brotherly friendship! Well, I was there too, meeting all possible nations, and should know what was what, I'd say. Between our emperors and kings, everything passed off cordially and amicably – of course! But among us soldiers? I can, admittedly, only speak about us, Bülow's regiment,⁵ but the friendship there really wasn't worth talking about and you couldn't have lured a dog away from the stove with it. And as for the Russians, we'd often have liked to tear them to pieces, if it had only been allowed; and the Swedes, who had such delicate concern for their health and life, we laughed at whenever we saw them."

"Well," the volunteer replies, "you may not be entirely wrong, father. It would be necessary for someone to collect the statements and experiences of the eyewitnesses, while they're still around. But as you're not so keen to talk about that time, it occurs to me that I know, in my hometown, an old coachman of Pastor Ahlmann in Belzin, who also served in our regiment and powerfully cursed that time, like you, but he cursed you as well, Father Ralow. His name is Peter Beck."

A sly smile plays around the corners of the old man's keen blue eyes. "Peter? So he's still alive? And doesn't want anything to do with me?"

⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm Freiherr von Bülow (1755-1816), Prussian general.

I can well imagine that! What happened between us, you ask? – Oh, that’s a long story; but as you’re tormenting me for a story, this may suit you at any rate.” The men move nearer and he begins:

“In the spring of 1812, there came to our regiment, among other recruits, a stocky little fellow who called himself Peter Beck and was from my village. Well, he completed his training without any of us older ones particularly bothering about him, was taken into the regiment in June, and saw to his duties. Then our attention was soon drawn to him, for he was the most foolish and the most peculiar creature in the world. The rest of us took life just as it came, even if we accompanied its coming with a strong oath when it really became too much, but *that* man was never satisfied and he railed at the world and mankind the livelong day. When it rained or stormed, he damned the rain and the storm; when the sun shone, he cursed the warmth; when we had to do duty, he called it slave-driving, and when we had nothing to do, he was full of fire and brimstone from the boredom. The food and drink weren’t good enough for him, the time for sleeping was always too short, late-rising hateful, standing sentry quite insufferable; if one of us said “Yes,” or: “That’s how it is,” then he was sure to rejoin “No,” and: “It’s different.” God knows how he came to be like that. He certainly wasn’t reared in comfort and ease at home. His parents had nothing in the world but their old hut, a strip of garden, their poverty and a dozen children.

“Now if you think that Peter, in such circumstances, discharged his duties badly and lazily, you’re mistaken. That was precisely the most curious thing about him, that the more he cursed and raged, the more

punctually and properly he fulfilled his obligations. The officers saw this and left him in peace, only laughing at him. They had in general become something different at that time, the masters: graver, certainly, but also more polite and gentler, and treated us more like men who are born of woman also. Aye, if Peter had come to us some ten years or so earlier with similar moods, with that countenance and the same tongue – dear God! I wouldn't have lent him my back for even an hour, not for the world.

“At first, when we saw this crazy being suddenly pop up among us, we didn't know whether we should laugh or be angry. This constant grumbling, grouching, and flaring up like a rabid dog had its funny side as well, and nipped our anger in the bud. Indeed, things reached the point where we would say to one another: on you go, and feel the force of his teeth! And when words and retorts were flying back and forth, we laughingly egged the quarrelers on to ever fiercer fury. Then it came, not infrequently, to small tussles, for when words aren't able to convince someone who's quarrelling unreasonably, then blows may do the trick. But here, they were no use either, for Peter was a match for his man, and indeed for two, and we got more than he did. In the end, we laughed at him, and then all was well. It wasn't long before he was the acknowledged, if involuntary, joker of the regiment. Someone would say, “Peter, curse!” and then Peter cursed, us first of all, and whatever we wanted after that. We wouldn't have done without him for the world.

“I too had words with him often enough, and mostly heated ones at that; seldom were they kind ones. After all, I was quite a different man at that time from nowadays, some thirty years younger, feeling myself to be at

my physical peak and held in high regard, and I haughtily looked down on such young know-it-alls. I had served for twenty-six years, taken part in half-a-dozen or so campaigns; I had wounds and medals also, and my standing in the regiment was not inconsiderable. Besides, I'd never been the sweetest-tempered or the most patient of men, and although we oldies had cursed the pipeclay service,⁶ which flourished among us in Anno Six, often enough, it had become a part of us nonetheless, and we couldn't feel at home at all in this rational behaviour, in these easings and innovations. And it's true that the military profession had formerly had a much higher standing, being much more strongly separated from the rest of the people, often sharply opposed to them, for we still had comrades among us from all lords' lands. So we had been obliged to rely on ourselves and were soldiers first and foremost, and secondly – well, just soldiers. Now, however, we were simply children of the country, and that had quite a different ring. Now, the word was that the labouring class and the teaching profession were higher than us, for they had produced us and we were chiefly designated for their protection. So we were, first of all, children of the country, or citizens, as people liked to name them; and only then soldiers. Consequently, much of the old spirit dropped away. And then serve only three more years, or even less! That may be nice and dandy for the land and for the people themselves, but it was the end for the genuine old soldiery. For how can a unanimous spirit and self-esteem develop in so short a time among young troops who can't grow close to each other? How

⁶ "Kamaschendienst" – military service which focuses on pedantic duties.

can they ever feel themselves to be a special profession?"

"But why have this profession and this feeling?" the volunteer cried, "why have a standing army in the first place? Wouldn't it be better –" "Have you caught the contagion too?" the drummer hastily interrupted him, a hot crimson rising to his face. "Are you drivelling in this new manner too? But basta! I'll tell you the tale now and not get worked up. – So that's how Peter Beck was, and that's how I was, and there being discord between us often enough is easy to understand. In the end, we got along, and I could keep my composure and laugh; but he wouldn't trust me and kept a cold and stiff attitude towards me, until we finally came closer together in spite of everything and got better acquainted.

"The Colonel of our regiment was one of the old school. He was certainly, as the saying goes, as brave as a demi-god, but also proud of his old family and his rank, haughty and cold to those of lower standing, contemptuously rude and severe to us soldiers, and civil only to his superiors and his peers – and there weren't all too many of those among us at that time. Previously, when he had had officers only from the high nobility and he himself was a Major in the Second Battalion, then Lieutenant Colonel in the First, he had been a high-spirited and invariably merry master. He had plagued his companies, had the men thrashed, and sworn so bad that the blue sky had to don mourning weeds; he was, moreover, the best, wildest friend of his comrades, and wherever there was a mad commotion, Count Berkhaus was sure to be there.

"Much of that had now come to an end. The cruel punishments and inhuman invectives had stopped, and there really were not so many bad

characters among us as before. The old officers had mostly fallen in battle or had left, the new ones were bourgeois or young, modest people, almost excessively quiet and serious, and wherever there remained a sharp old brush from a former age, or a wild, sassy jackanapes, they suited themselves to the times; and what they could not help doing, they did in secret. So the Colonel had to do without a great deal, all the more so as he was now married, with a family, and the old merriment lit up only rarely. But everything he had to give up elsewhere, he carried over into his pride in his family and rank, so that he, who was at most a Count and commander of a regiment, and that but barely, could not have given himself more airs and graces if he'd been a Prince. Now it's said to have been the fashion in Princely houses in earlier times to keep a man to make everyone merry, who was called the Fool, and the very same folly, God knows how, came into the Lord Count's head. In short, it was suddenly reported: the Colonel had remarked at parade, with bitter scorn, that the times were too serious for him and his family, and the people also. It was enough to bore one to death. He must have something new, and as laughter had died and gone to Heaven, he would content himself with grumbling, and he heard that Peter Beck was the man for him. So he intended to take him as his orderly and listen as he vilified away. No sooner said than done. A few days later, Peter waited at table with the other servant and reported the news after his fashion. He had what it takes to do this, for he wasn't stupid and was as bold as they make them.

“We had grown accustomed to Peter's waspish nature; but no sooner had he become the Colonel's favourite than something else made

him unbearable to us. Just imagine, the creature became vain, so vain that he could stand before his little mirror for half an hour, setting his hair this way and that way, twisting his mouth and rolling his eyes, all in deep silence and with great satisfaction. He certainly had no cause for that, he was anything but handsome; and even if he had been! A man can do better than give himself up to such female tomfoolery.

“We scolded him, made fun of him, but in vain. Indeed, on the contrary, things became even worse when he grew his beard – a splendid one, incidentally. He let it grow, at the bottom and at the top, however and wherever it so wished, in a clear breach of the regulations. And this damned beard was the reason he irremediably fell out with me and we came close to experiencing murder and mayhem in our regiment once again. The Colonel had allowed his favourite this infringement of the rules and the officers overlooked it for that reason, and all the more easily as they didn’t see him often, for being the Colonel’s orderly, he was exempt from all ordinary duties.

“But the Major of the Second Battalion, to which Peter belonged, was a different man. He was called Reiter, a commoner, had joined the colours in autumn 1806 after the disaster at Jena, and had become a captain as soon as spring 1807. At the Battle of Friedland, he captured a battery with forty-nine men, which he admittedly had to abandon afterwards, as he had only twenty-seven men left and didn’t receive any help. So he became a Major. He was an able, brave soldier, but he was a soldier to the tips of his fingernails – excessively strict and unspeakably curt and serious. He got on so-so with the Colonel. Both were strict, and

that pleased them both; but one of them was a high-spirited, merry cavalier, at least as often as possible, and the other could not stand that; and the latter was a commoner, and sober and serious, and the former could not stomach that.

“Now when the new autumn recruits had completed their training and the entire battalion was on duty for the first time, the Major saw Peter, who had to come out with everyone else on this occasion. Then he rode up to him and cried with no little heat: “Hey, fellow! The effrontery! – The regulation! – Corporal!” – The Corporal of the Inspection stepped forward, was sharply addressed, and reported that Peter was the Colonel’s orderly. “Colonel’s orderly or no Colonel’s orderly,” cried the Major, “No excuse! Idiocy! Adjutant, arrest both! – Squad Lieutenant and Captain! Come here, sirs! How could you overlook the likes of that? What’s the meaning of this? Don’t you know your duty?” “I know my duty and am not in the habit of overlooking things,” replied the Captain, blood-red from suppressed vexation, “but Beck told me it was the Colonel’s order.” “Eh? What?” asked the Major, with apparent coolness; but we saw his thighs pressing the horse and making it tremble. “The Colonel’s order? We’ll see about that! – Fall in! Attention! Sections, right about-face! March!”

“While we were setting to work and had just fallen into line for the parade march, the Colonel came riding to the square in a short gallop, as was his wont, then dashed towards the front and cried, barely casting a brief look over us. “Oh, you cursed fellows, everything is skew-whiff again! In line, by thunder! In line! – Good morning, Major! Have them march past, but straight!” And with that, he wheeled his horse sharply and rode some

twenty paces forward. The Major rode after him and said, "Colonel, I have just been deeply vexed: a gross violation of the regulations!" "Indeed?" the other answered indifferently, "Well, have the fellow given a thrashing." "But," said the Major, "the worst of it is that he alleges it was your order." "Hm!" said the other, throwing his head back in surprise and in contempt. "Yes," replied the Major, "Peter Beck, your orderly! A beard like a Jew! With your permission!" "Oh, I see!" laughed the Colonel, "Yes, that's right. I allowed him to." "The regulations!" said the Major, putting his hand to his hat. "Nonsense!" replied the commander, "My will, I suppose, will make this single exception possible; the fellow wants it, it suits him, and it would be a shame about the beard, which is better than mine and yours put together." "The regulations!" said the Major stubbornly; "in my battalion –" "What?" the Colonel flared up, hitting his horse on its head with his clenched fist and making it rear up high – "What, Hell and Damnation, sir, there is nothing that violates the regulations other than your disobedience to me, and I won't tolerate that in my regiment, not I! Understood?" "Very well!" rejoined the Major, giving a salute, "then nothing remains but to..." "Make a complaint!" said the Colonel, very cold now, while tipping his hat, "in God's name! But first ask me for permission, in accordance with the rules, I won't refuse you it, and then you may go wherever you have a mind to."

"We stood stock-still during this whole exchange, the soldiers with shouldered arms, we with our sticks on our drums, and heard every word, for they had stopped, as I said, near to us, and had spoken, as you might imagine, not in the quietest voices. Now I don't know what you think, but we liked the Major more than the Colonel; for all that he was so severe, he

was always a very courteous and, in the main, calm and cool-headed man, and now we thought it a pity that he'd been given such a dressing-down in front of the entire battalion. It seems that the other finally realised the impropriety of his action; he began to laugh and said, "But this kind of thing isn't appropriate in front of the troops. The fellows may be having the most wonderful fancies about what their superiors are trying to sort out with each other so vehemently, and we're not, after all, arguing about the Emperor's, but only about Peter's, beard!⁷ Will you dine with me this noon, Reitern?" The Major bowed. "Very well! And now have the men march past, Major, but straight, straight!" cried the Colonel, and he steered his horse another twenty paces onwards.

"Our duty began again and came to an end without any particular interruption. Except that the second Platoon of the Fifth Company walked past in bad order; the blame lay on the right flank, the Major condemned the two men who stood there to arrest, the Colonel confirmed it, and in the afternoon the flank-man and Peter, for it was he, walked into the prison for twenty-four hours. But before that, he had to wait at table as he ordinarily did and hand the Major his pipe after the meal and light it. Then the Colonel asked with a laugh if the Major did not wish to let the fellow off from punishment. "Does the Colonel order that?" he replied. "Hogwash!" he rejoined, hastily turning around, "I order nothing!" "Into the prison!" the Major then cried, "tidy yourself up and pay attention!"

"That's what Peter told us, when he came back out on the following

⁷ "Um des Kaisers Bart streiten" [to argue about the Emperor's beard] means to argue about a trivial matter.

day, and we, who were from the same region, were sitting together in a small inn in the new market, where we had our base, so to speak. He was now nothing but rancour and rage against the Major and against everyone and everything possible. During the twenty-four hours, in which he hadn't been able to talk to anyone, he seemed to have assembled all his malice; now it came cascading out, like water from a raised sluice. We laughed and got annoyed.

“But you're a fool!” I said at last, “do you want to take on the Major?” “Yes!” he replied, “I'll never forget his arresting me as long as I live! He should think of me; my old man's sure to protect me.” “Indeed?” I said, “and if the old man is called away today or tomorrow? For they say that some colonels and generals have fallen in Russia.” Peter scratched his head, but said all the same that he would come through all right. “You're a fool,” I continued, “and will drive yourself to destruction. What can you do to the Major? Nothing! If you're wise, you'll go to the Colonel and ask his permission to have your cursed beard cut off.” “What?” yelled Peter, starting up and leaping before the mirror on the window-pier, “My beard? Cut off? because of the Major? It's easy for you to say that, with your sprouts and bum-fluff, but me? Cut off? Never ever! And now I definitely won't do it! And on my life, no human soul shall take it from me!”

“Stuff and nonsense!” I said to that. “You're making such a row as if it were a question of your salvation. And all this only for a beard! What do you bet, Peter, I'll cut it off with my own hands, at your own request?” He looked at me in consternation and with distrust. “Well!” he said at last, “and when?” “All the more fool I, were I to fix the time,” I replied, when I saw that

he had taken seriously what I had said only in jest. "By a year today, if you like!" The others laughed and exultantly urged us on. "And at my own request?" Peter asked again. "Certainly." "And when I'm awake and healthy?" "Of course." "Well, done! It's a deal, Father Ralow! I bet my soul and salvation, or, if you prefer, a month's wages." "Stuff and nonsense!" I replied, "we're Christians and poor soldiers. A glass of brandy for each of the fifteen of us, I'll accept that." – "Fine!" he said, "that's what it'll be; a year today we'll be together, and then we'll see what's what."

"Now, you will ask, lad," the drummer said after a pause, "what I had in mind? Nothing! I saw no means to achieve my purpose. It had just been a foolish notion. But it caused me little concern, for a year was a long time, and much might chance to happen. In the meantime, our bet made the rounds through the town. The Colonel threw dark looks at me, the Major sharp ones, and the officers nodded to me and laughed; the Major of the First Battalion, a splendid man and my great patron, pressed my hand with a laugh one day and said, "Now, Father, take care that you don't lose!" – Things went on thus for several days, then everything was forgotten. Peter didn't speak a word to me for a while and regarded me with suspicion. But gradually, as I showed no signs of making a move, he fell back into his old way."

The drummer fell silent, then stood up and went out, without excusing himself. That is generally not his way of behaving, as he thinks the others must find what he does to be right, or at least bearable. It certainly does not bother him much what they think of him because the regiment knows and respects his way after so many years of service. And

then they also owe him a debt of gratitude for his yielding to their requests to tell a tale, which he does so seldom.

“But how did he remove his beard?” asked the corporal; “and he surely did remove it.” “But what officers those were!” cried the Volunteer, “it must have been an awful state of affairs at that time. Thank God! it’s different now.” The Corporal shrugged his shoulders; but before he could make any reply, the old drummer walked back in, rested his arm on the window-ledge and puffed out large clouds of smoke before him. “When you are ready,” he said, “I’ll continue my tale.” The others nodded in silence and arranged themselves around him once more. The old man threw one more rapid glance at the wide square and the old gabled houses, turned his eyes to the Volunteer, who sat cross-legged on the plank-bed, and resumed:

“So I was saying that the wager was soon forgotten. It was a dizzying time then, when everything was at sixes and sevens. Soon after that day we learned that General York had come to an understanding with the Russians. Then our war reserves came gradually, and almost secretly, into the town and to the regiment; instead of 1,000 men, we soon numbered over 2,000 and were up to our ears in duties. Then it was reported that the King had travelled to Breslau, as the French had wanted to take him prisoner in Potsdam. The calls to arms followed very soon, volunteers assembled with us also, there was a press and surge of men everywhere. Our Third Battalion came to us, old Bülow inspected the regiment, and we marched out at last on March the 16th and advanced to the army corps’ assembly-point. The war began; on April the 5th, I think, we

came under fire for the first time, at Möckern,⁸ held our own, and beat the French, and so it went on. However, I'm not going to tell you about the campaign, but only about us.

“Enough to say, every one of you will understand that nobody gave any thought to Peter Beck's beard during all this time; we had better things to do. I myself, I believe, had as good as forgotten it likewise, until it came to my attention, quite by chance, after that first affair on April the 5th. A ball had slightly grazed Peter's breast, and the doctor who put a plaster on him in the field that evening – for in those days, you didn't go into the lazaretto for such a scratch – said to him, “Lift your beard up, man, so I can get at you.” Then I thought of the business once again, but in the following time, which was turbulent enough, it completely slipped my mind again.

“Well, on August the 23rd we fought, as you know, at Großbeeren and, for the next few days, followed the French, with no little fervour, towards Wittenberg. On the 26th, the Second Battalion, including Peter and me, came into a small village in the evening, where we were to rest the following day, for we were dead tired, almost boiled by the rain and the heat, and we'd hardly had even a distant sight of the French that day. The First Battalion lay by some huts a quarter of an hour ahead of us to the left, and the Third occupied the outposts a quarter of an hour further ahead. So as I said, we were washed-out and hungry, but there was nothing to bite or break in the village, and so we soon lay down on our ear on the little hay and straw that our and the French foragers had left there. And we lay free

⁸ A battle fought on April the 5th 1813, which resulted in victory for the Prussian and Russians forces over the French, as did the Battle of Großbeeren (mentioned later).

from care, our own regiment in front of us, our volunteer riflemen on our right in Elsbruch, and the other troops further on. The enemy was far ahead and had barely even shown his teeth the last few days. And we slept, major and officer, soldier and drummer.

“Peter and I were together. In the backmost corner of the loft in a shed, we had found a little hay, taken off our shoes and crawled into it. I dreamt – I can see it still, as though it were yesterday – about a heated fight; gunfire rattled all around; ‘Double-quick pace!’ cried the Colonel, and I beat my drum – and suddenly started right up out of sleep. Then I really did hear the crack of shots and a diabolical din, I also clearly heard my name being called, then people running this way and that. The others who had been lying near us had already gone, perhaps they had forgotten us in their haste. I jumped into my shoes, called Peter to wake him, rushed for my drum and then, Beck behind me, it was down the ladder. A fine how-do-you-do! Dawn was just breaking and the village was brightly ablaze. The French were rushing into the streets just then; our Battalion had already been forced back, and our riflemen were in a ditch at the back, with enemy riflemen on horse and on foot in the open country before them.

One look showed me this and, at the same time, that we were cut off and our tirailleurs⁹ were already two hundred paces away. Meanwhile, bullets rattled around us, sparks flew over from the nearest burning building, and a comrade lay before us, blood pouring from a deathly wound in his breast. The sole possible flight route had to be attempted along the

⁹ Skirmishers.

stable-buildings of a farm, and so we set out. But the damned chasseurs¹⁰ saw us and some of them galloped towards us. Our men, who had also caught sight of us, fired, a horse, a man plunged to the ground, Peter ran his sword through a second one, but another one gave him a blow that knocked his shako onto his nose while he himself tumbled down. I ran a few paces further, but another one caught up with me, my wretched sabre shattered in my hand, I received a slight wound to my head, and before we had recovered our wits, we were running to the forage lines beside our new masters.

“So we came to the French regiment, were received with a Hooray!, surrounded by gabbling, and surveyed. They thought it a real feather in their caps, I believe, to have taken two Prussians prisoner. And we were the only ones on this occasion, for a third one, a rifleman, was severely wounded and died very soon after. We were presently brought before a General, who jabbered with us, but we understood nothing of his language, and he nothing of ours, except that he kept asking with great vehemence: ‘What’s that? Bülow? Tautentzien?’¹¹ I said yes to that and nodded, although they were both about three to four leagues away. As for Peter, he kept stubbornly silent and had defiance and fury in his eyes, for his nose had been badly skinned. Well might they give him two or three blows with the flat of their blades to get him to speak – he wouldn’t have spoken to me right then, let alone to the enemy. At length, they let us be and gradually

¹⁰ Light cavalry.

¹¹ Bogislav Friedrich Emanuel von Tautentzien (1760-1824), Count and Prussian general.

withdrew an hour later. It had only been a sharp reconnoitering.

“So we slowly marched on until around noon, when we stopped in a village. The chasseurs set up camp here, while the other troops marched yet further on. Here, there was an officer from a German regiment in enemy service, where he was from I don’t know, who had us up again and interrogated us. Peter, however, did not open his mouth this time either, and I frankly declared to him that we were obviously only common soldiers and it wasn’t the custom in our army to tell the likes of us the plans and dispositions. We knew nothing except that Bülow and Tauentzien and another half-dozen high-ranking heads had been nearby when we were taken prisoner. He seemed to understand that; he was a humane gentleman and spoke very softly. So we were finally left in peace and confined in a gable-room of the inn, which was full of officers and troops. For that reason, they probably didn’t think it necessary to set a guard just for us. How could we get away through the whole regiment, whose men were swarming around on all sides? We received a piece of bread, and then we were sitting alone.

“But now misery and wailing burst out – or should I rather say, cursing. That afternoon, Peter was near becoming a beast, and the Devil’s words would almost be prayers compared with the blasphemous talk he came out with then. He railed at the service and the hustle and bustle and hurry-scurry of the last few days which had left us so exhausted, at the cursed sleep which had kept such a firm grip of us, at our comrades, the villains, who had not taken us with them, and at God knows what else. Then came a bit of despair at our being prisoners and having to lose our

honour and reputation; then a curse on the regiment, which hadn't supported us properly in our fight for freedom; immediately afterwards, a stream of invectives on the French, who had broken his head and then demanded from his feet an effort almost beyond their power, and in the end taken our knapsacks from us; finally, there even came horror, as he believed that the enemy shot all Prussian prisoners dead from bitter hatred. He was willing to die before the enemy, but to be shot like a dog – he didn't want that; and with those words, the strong fellow burst into tears like a child.

“I listened to all of this and had my own thoughts. I could see nothing to reproach ourselves for. Our sleeping so soundly was no wonder, nor was our not hearing the shooting earlier. We had heard it so often in the last few days that our ears had got used to it. When we came out, nobody could help us anymore, and now, also, help could come to us only from ourselves. We were prisoners; we had to free ourselves or die. That was my only thought. But how? There was nothing to be done for the moment, before evening and night came, so I applied myself to comforting Peter in the meantime. But I didn't breathe a word of my thoughts of freedom to him; for all the qualities he possessed, he was lacking in level-headedness, and he could easily have spoiled everything in his haste. At that very moment he had flown into a rage again and said we should jump out of the window, break the neck of the first chasseur we came across, take his weapons, mount two horses, and up and away. I had a hard enough time of it stopping him from making the attempt and breaking his neck at the entrance. However, I did manage to do it, and he now ran the

French down again in the most deplorable terms.

“So the afternoon went by. Around six o’clock or thereabouts, an orderly suddenly came galloping up, we heard people running hither and thither in the inn, the trumpeters blew for assembly and mounting, the regiment put itself in order, a corporal rode back to the inn with six men, and the others rode off at a sharp trot. We watched all this. Peter stayed at the window and swore mightily; I walked back and threw myself onto a straw shakedown which they had spread out for us beside the door. I wanted to reflect, for I wanted to be free, and I had to own that everything had worked in our favour up to then. If we hadn’t been locked up, but, as was usual, had had to stay with the troops in the field, how could we have escaped a hundred observing eyes? We had been treated uncommonly well in the main, our shoes and clothes, which were admittedly badly tattered, had been left us, only our knapsacks had been taken from us, in which there was nothing to fetch out, and then confined on our own! Did they have something particular in mind for us, or had they done this simply because there were just two and not two hundred of us?

“While all of this was going around in my head and Peter still stood at the window, there was movement at the door. It opened softly, a fat red face stuck itself in, the man looked around cautiously, put his finger to his lips and beckoned. Noisily and indifferently, so as not to attract Peter’s attention, I stood up and walked closer. Then he whispered: “Aren’t you Ralow of the M- Musketeers?” Amazed and delighted, I signalled in the affirmative; but I almost cried out loud in joy, for I recognised him to be an old comrade from 1790 and fondly thought myself and Peter to be already

saved. The questioner nodded, raised all ten fingers – that meant ten o'clock – and the door closed again. At the same moment, Peter shouted, at the window: "Just as I thought! The devil really has brought them back here, the damned frog-eaters!" I walked over to him and saw a regiment of cuirassiers trotting up, and a column of infantry also came into sight in the distance. Then the chasseurs who had remained behind rode up to the regimental commander, spoke with him, pointed up to us and dashed away. I saw nothing out of the ordinary in any of this. The enemy was just changing his outposts. The cuirassiers dismounted and the infantry came up.

"It was not long before an officer came up to us, interrogated us in the German tongue again, raged and threatened when he didn't learn what he wanted to, and left, at last, no wiser than when he had come. Peter heartily sent curses after him.

"Around eight o'clock or thereabouts – it was already quite dark – we heard the troops set out again. Shortly afterwards, a corporal came to us, speaking German likewise. At first, he behaved with hostile rudeness and brusqueness and would have had us tied up, the one in this corner, the other in that corner of the room. At that, my blood began to boil.

"Comrade," I said, "you're an old soldier and a good one, I can see that from the gold braid on your arm, and you must know that anyone can have the misfortune to be taken prisoner in the field. But that's no disgrace for him and no crime for which he ought to be bound. I'm a soldier too, and an old one, and have been part of enough campaigns and know what's the custom in war. You're our countryman and we're not fighting with you, but

with the Emperor of France, who has made life a little too hot for us. You'd be better going and doing a Christian act by giving us something to eat and drink, for we've had nothing since yesterday evening but a piece of bread and our heartache at being prisoners, and that does good to no man.

“The man listened to this, growling at first, but laughing in the end, for he was an honest soul; and he got into a long discussion with me which brought us to a very good understanding. He was a Westphalian and didn't give a damn for Napoleon; but he just happened to be our enemy and, as an upright soldier, he had to detain us. Then he brought us bread and a piece of bacon and also something for our thirst. Finally, he said, “Now, comrades, I'm no barbarian, so you can remain unbound. But shake off any desire to run away; I have my guards ready in the inn and under the window, and they will shoot you dead without fail. Tomorrow, another man may have the care of you, and if he's French and you can give him the slip, good luck on your way!” – With that, he took the candle, left, locked the door, and took out the key.

“Now we were alone. Should I say anything to Peter about my old comrade appearing? But just then he laid himself down in the straw and said, all melancholic: “Well, Ralow, good night! It may well be our last, old 'un; tomorrow, these bloodhounds will put their guns to our heads and – bang! And I wouldn't shed any tears over this miserable life, but –” and he turned round and held his tongue. I did likewise, lay calmly on the straw, and pondered how my friend meant to come in to us and go out with us. For his intending to do the latter was only natural; otherwise, what was the point of his being my old comrade?

“All was quiet in the inn. Outside I heard the guards walking up and down, and a horse snorting every now and then. Peter was snoring; mice were gnawing in the ceiling above me. I tell you, I wouldn’t want to go through another such hour of waiting and worry for the world. My eyes were burning, and my heart was pounding fit to burst.”

The old man felt silent and let his eyes sweep thoughtfully over the square. The listeners waited, not making a sound, for the continuation; they were powerfully drawn by the tale and, even more, by the teller himself. There is something about the old drummer that makes those who meet him forget his slight education and his low rank, and instils them with a sense of respect. And it is always thus where the true, the worthy, the sensitive man looks through the mask which social station, circumstances and education or lack of education – as the case may be – have tied on the human face. For you may believe that there is aren’t so excessively many people in the world, and “I am looking for men” is as far from a foolish statement today as it was at the time when a man with a lantern in his hand spoke those words.¹² In the meantime, the old man resumed his tale.

“So I sat and waited over an hour, I should think. An hour! That isn’t long, but for a man waiting in that situation, sixty minutes becomes sixty eternities. I perceived that then. My heart was pounding and sweat covered my brow, although I was a strong, sedate man. Finally, I began to count, from sheer desperation, slowly, up to sixty each time, and then from

¹² Diogenes of Sinope (c.404 – 323 B.C.), Greek Cynic philosopher.

the beginning again; for it's awful not to know how the time is going on.

“In this way, I had counted up to the nineteenth minute when I heard something moving in the room. A streak of light shot in, so suddenly, and disappeared again, so rapidly, that I didn't see where it had come from, nor where it was now. Then all was quiet – nothing but Peter's snoring – then a soft sound, as if someone were crawling over the ground. The next moment, I felt a body beside mine, and my old comrade's voice whispered, “Quiet, it's me! Your comrade is having a sound sleep. Now, how can I help you?” “Out of here, man, out of here!” I rejoined, grasping his hand. “That's what I thought,” he replied. “Well, perhaps something can be done about that; I helped a man out of here in May and am ready now to do it again. But there's a good while yet, you can't go before break of day.” “But Peter must of course go with me,” I said. “Hmm!” he grunted and was silent. “Well,” he said at last, “I hadn't actually reckoned on him. I recognised you at once and resolved to help you get away, if you stayed the night here. But he – well, it'll have to be okay,” he whispered at length, “but he'll have to cut off that damned beard.”

“Then everything from that earlier time suddenly came together in my head and I had difficulty stifling my laughter. “Quiet!” I said, “the beard will come off, but listen to what I have to tell you.” And then I recounted the story to him, exactly as you've just heard, only shorter. At the same time, I reported how Peter had an uncommon fear of being shot because he was a Prussian, that he would strive with body and soul to get out, and he would certainly sacrifice his beard, if there were some reason that called for it.

“Well,” the other said with a laugh, “I have the reason at hand, and a very weighty one at that. In all my house, I have no men’s clothes save the ones for you and those I wear on my person, all other ones have been taken from me. I came upon an outfit for you quite by chance a few days ago. It’s from a poor devil of a balsam-hawker from the Thuringian Forest whom they seized as a spy and hanged. But for Peter, I’ve nothing save one of my old woman’s outfits, she’s his height and a bit broader and fatter. And it goes without saying that he can’t run around in women’s clothes with his beard. He might as well just keep his coat on in that case. The beard must come off! Don’t worry, I’ll make him sweat, you’ll see, and I’ll do it perfectly naturally, so he won’t notice a thing.” “But he *will* notice,” I replied, “the moment he sees that we know each other and we’ve made an arrangement.” “You look to yourself, friend,” he countered, “and leave Peter to me. I’ll be going around twelve, you wake him then and tell him that I was here this afternoon and will be coming soon; the rest is my affair. But now, let’s have a chat.” – And that’s what happened. He had left us in 1797, had married into this inn, things were going well for him, and up to now he had brought himself and his family through the war safely enough, like an old soldier.

“At last it was time to act. He took himself off as quietly as he had come, without my noticing where he went; it was awfully dark in the chamber and outside it was raining like mad. When all was still, I crept over to snoring Peter, put my hand over his mouth so he wouldn’t make any noise, and shook him awake. “Peter,” I said, “this is what happened to me this afternoon, and I’ll tell you it now, although the old fellow won’t

come until 12. But actually, it must be midnight soon, for the guards outside were relieved some time ago.” Peter rubbed his hands with delight.

“Meanwhile, there was movement in the corridor outside, we flew apart, and Peter snored with all his might; a key was put in the door, it opened, a light shone into the room and our Corporal looked in. “Well,” he said with a laugh, seeing me start up, “you’re still here, comrade; it’s unholy weather outside.” “Devil take you!” I replied peevishly, looking quickly and stealthily around the room, to see if everything was in order. “I was just about to drop off and I’m dog-tired. What time is it?” “Midnight soon. Sleep then, I won’t disturb you any longer. Your comrade there is droning like an organ-pipe.” The door closed again and all was silent. “Why didn’t we hold onto the beast and bump him off!” growled Peter. “Because it would have made a noise and that would be the end of us!” I answered curtly; “You’ll be a fool until your dying day!”

“We sat for a while; then we heard a sound, and my friend’s voice quietly asked, “Are you awake?” “Yes.” “Then come, give me your hand and follow me on your hands and feet, for we have to pass through a low hole. The other one may grip you by your coat, but quietly, so the blasted servant doesn’t hear us.” We followed him; the way went through the wall into a narrow passage, where our shoulders touched the sides. Soon he bid us stop and squeezed past us, going backwards. “Alright,” he said, when he came back a few moments later, “now stand up and go forward.” After a few steps we entered a small, low and illuminated room, where a fat, jolly woman received us with a hearty welcome and, it seemed to me, mischievous laughter.

“So,” said the innkeeper, “you’re safe here for the time being; I’ve concealed this little room here to the best of my wit, and if they don’t burn us out, they won’t find you. Did you see the cupboard in your room, the one with the broken flap door? Well, it has casters on its feet, and because it’s so easy to move, the damned French have cleaned it out. Behind it, there’s a panel in the wall that can be taken out. That’s how you’re here – but how shall I help you next?”

“Why, father,” said his wife, “you must do something for the poor men. You were a soldier once yourself, and you know that the enemy treats prisoners savagely, particularly the Prussian ones.” “God knows, yes,” he replied, shrugging his shoulders. “Tomorrow, you’re sure to be taken to Erfurt, as they say; but that’s just a figure of speech – for on the way, what happens is – this.” He mimed raising a rifle to his shoulder. “You understand me?” “Damn and blast!” growled Peter, trembling all over. “Father! The poor men!” said his wife again. “Oh, damn it all,” he said, “of course I’d like to help them, but *how*? You can’t go from here in your uniforms; you’d be sure to come upon a guard or a patrol, and once you’re recognised, you’re dead men. Now I have only the one suit of clothes, and for you, little one, it’s far too big; it will barely fit the other man. For you, comrade, I’m truly at a loss.” “Comrade!” cried Peter, pale as death. “You wouldn’t leave me in the lurch, would you?” “Listen, friend,” I said then, for I did, after all, have to chip in as well, “if Peter doesn’t go, I don’t go either.” “God thank you for that, comrade!” said Peter, in a tone of utter melancholy which almost made me repent what we had planned for him. The innkeeper seemed to be still thinking things over; finally, he said with a

laugh, “Now, I do know a way, but who knows if you’ll like it, because it’s eccentric: but Necessity knows no law. You are small, friend: would you put on women’s clothes, from my old lady here?” “Yes, yes, yes!” cried Peter with delight, “give them here! But then my beard will have to come off – but that’s no matter! Here, give the clothes here, so we can get out of this cursed hole!” Evidently, in his fear, he was thinking only of the moment.

“That’s how it is?” asked the innkeeper. “Then everything’s in order. But sit down for now, eat and drink and rest. You have a good two hours yet. In those outfits, one of you as a balsam-hawker, the other as his wife, you cannot let yourselves be found on the road at night and dewfall. And besides, if everything comes to pass as I expect it to, you won’t find the last part of your way in the dark. So eat and drink and pay attention, and I’ll describe the terrain to you.” There was an abundance of all kinds of tasty morsels there, which seldom come a poor soldier’s way at such times, and we listened attentively. What he said doesn’t concern you; suffice to say that later, everything happened just so.

“When we were ready, he went out and fetched an armful of clothes and a razor. “Can you shave, comrade?” he asked me. I nodded. “Well then, off with the beard! But make it smooth, especially around the mouth; the bonnet and neckerchief will cover the face. Wife, light them!” The hostess held the light, Peter kept perfectly still, and I scraped away and stifled my laughter. It really was too droll for words.”

“But it wasn’t right,” said the volunteer, shaking his head, “poor Peter!” The others laughed. “No,” replied the drummer, “it wasn’t right, for we should go easy even on folly in people when it’s part of their nature. But

what would you have? Where is the man who doesn't have the occasional caprice? And indeed, I knew no other way out. Enough: when we were ready and I had cut off my mustachios, we got dressed and Peter took a bundle of old stuffs in his hand; he was a fine woman, and we nearly died laughing at him. Then I took my medicine-chest on my back; for weapons, each of us had only one good, sharp knife, and I had a stout, gnarled walking-stick. I kept nothing of the soldier on me save my drumsticks, which I'd saved on the previous morning. I'd beaten with them for twenty-six years, and I need them still; one day, they'll be laid in the grave with me.

“Then we took our leave and the innkeeper led us, by way of attics, through all kinds of paling and heaps of pease-straw to an opening in the back gable, where the corn is brought up. He let a ladder down and we climbed down it. There was an Egyptian darkness, as always towards dawn, and the rain fell in torrents. We walked in a ditch until we reached a wood, where the innkeeper left us, and turning right, we found a fairly dry footpath and walked on in silence. We had no desire to speak, and it wasn't advised, as guards could be hidden on any side. We kept walking for a long time and the road led ever further to the left into the wood. Finally, it may have been around four o'clock, for a little light had just appeared in the sky, we came to a crossroads. To the left and the right, open country could be seen nearby, while straight ahead the trees and shrubs stretched on. “Peter,” I said quietly, “the decisive moment has come; pull your bonnet over your nose.”

“We went to the right, and straightaway a soldier sprang out of the

bushes and called to us in German. We stood still. "Who are you?" "I'm a balsam-hawker, going with my wife to sell my wares." "Where have you come from so early?" I jabbed my thumb over my shoulder, named a village whose name the innkeeper had told me, and said we had to be on the road early in such turbulent times. "Where to?" I pointed forward, where another village was said to lie behind the bush. So it appeared that we were in the line of sentries. "Good," said the soldier, "then go down this road which you see before you through the meadows. If you deviate, I'll shoot. You've had a quarrel with your wife?" he added, looking into Peter's face. "Yes," I replied, "I showed her who's the master in the house. God be with you, Mister Soldier, and many thanks." And we continued down the road.

"Just as we entered the bushes, a long sunbeam lighted the treetops; but that lasted only an instant, all became grey again and the rain kept falling. At that moment an infantry column ahead of us on our left marched away. The enemy was withdrawing his night-sentries, perhaps his entire force. At any rate, this diminished our danger, for we could hope to get through without meeting a sentry. We heard individual shots in the distance. The road made a curve to the left, deeper into the wood.

"We walked a few paces further, but then, when all remained silent and nothing suspicious was to be seen, I threw my medicine-chest off, and Peter his bundle, and we struck into the bushes. We ran as swiftly and quietly as we could, reached the edge of the wood after a few hundred paces, and listened and peered. All was still; there were no sounds but the rain dripping in the leaves, and we could hear our hearts beating. A plain

lay before us, scattered bushes at first, then open country, and a village further on. We thought to find friends there. To the right, the wood stretched on; in the distance, shots were fired into and out from it, without our being able to catch sight of the shooters. Thinking was no use here. We walked out, headed slowly for the nearest shrubs, then I bid Peter hold his skirts up and it was forwards as fast as our legs could carry us. Then shots began to ring out behind us, first here, then there, at two, at five, at ten places. But for one thing, we were already too far away and covered every now and then by the bushes, and for another, we ran this way and that, changing our direction, as often as we could, without lengthening our road all too much. However, a bullet tore my hat off – I didn't look round for it –, another one grazed my arm, a third one passed into Peter's leg. But far from holding him up, it was only a warning not to tarry, and he ran like the Devil. We crashed down onto the wet ground a few times, but then it was up again and off like the bullet from the barrel. A few cuirassiers chased after us out of the wood, but they saw that we were too far ahead and soon turned round. Before us, on the right, shots became ever more frequent.

“Finally, some two hundred paces from the village, where a row of single thorn-bushes stretched along beside a ditch, someone suddenly said: “Stop, who goes there?” We stood panting, but we couldn't speak. It was our riflemen. “Who goes there? I'll shoot!” said the sentry, raising his gun. At last I found my tongue. “-th Regiment!” I cried. “Who are you?” he asked, “I belong to it myself.” “Don't you know Ralow and Peter Beck?” I forgot that we had different clothes on and were the worse for wear after

our flight through thick and thin; Peter had also dropped his skirts again. “Hurrah!” was the cry now, “Ralow and Peter! Welcome, comrades! Come in, come in!”

“Need I say much more? We found our regiment at the village, who were in the vanguard again that day and had bivouacked there. The Third Battalion had already set out and its tirailleurs were exchanging scattered shots with the enemy over towards the wood. We were received with wild jubilation like men who had risen from the dead; officers and soldiers, everyone beamed with joy and roared with laughter at our set-up, and at our escape, the particulars of which they had in part seen for themselves, in part soon got out by questioning us. Nobody had yet thought about Peter’s beard, but I kept my eyes peeled and my ears pricked in the meantime, and so we entered the circle where both majors were waiting for the Colonel, who was tarrying in the village.

“Reporting us back from imprisonment, Major,” I said, saluting the Major of the Second. He gave a friendly nod, first looked at Peter from top to toe, then me, then Peter again, then he turned away and burst into laughter. The Major of the First did likewise and walked up to me. “Well, Ralow,” he said, shaking my hand, “that’s killing two birds with one stone.” “Yes, sir,” I replied with a laugh. Peter still did not notice anything, for up to this point he was entirely taken up with joy at our liberation.

“Meanwhile the Colonel arrived. We were announced to him. “Ill weeds grow apace!” he said, laughing. “I’m pleased that you got out. How did you do it? You look like grass-devils. Peter, take that infamous thing off your head!” No sooner had Peter uncovered his head than the Colonel

gave a start. "Three-score thousand thunders!" he shouted angrily, "what does the fellow look like? What have you done with your beard, scoundrel?" Then Peter, who had been staring up at him in utter consternation the while, threw his hands up towards his face, as if searching for something, looked wildly around, then looked at me, let his arms fall, and rapped out a blasphemous curse. The officers laughed out loud, the soldiers standing farther away followed suit; it ran like wildfire through the entire regiment to the sentries: I had taken Peter's beard from him and won the bet.

"I stayed as serious as possible and told the Colonel how the matter had unfolded. However, he said that he remembered the bet very well, and asked in a voice that was all scorn if I had not perhaps played the part of barber myself? "Yes, sir," I answered, "there was no mirror for a self-shave, and the innkeeper had to see to the clothes, so there was only the wife and I left; she held the light and I shaved. The other way round wouldn't have been a success." "Ha!" snapped the Colonel, threatening me with his fist, "You're very quick with your defence, fellow. Take care that you don't speak worse for yourself another time! For I'll seek you out and seize you, depend on it! And now forwards, gentlemen! You, fellow, shift yourself to the baggage wagon and make haste to follow after, or thunder will roll down on your head!"

"Peter had to endure a great deal of mockery and was furious, particularly as he now suffered a lot of pain from his wound as well and had to go into the lazaretto; for it was worse than we had thought. The excitement had sustained him but also aggravated his wound. He was,

however, soon on his feet again, but the wound inflicted on his honour by me never healed as long as he was with us. He always obstinately believed that the whole thing had been a put-up joke and the innkeeper had had other clothes, which wasn't in fact the case. He inveighed savagely against me, but I took comfort, for there was one man in the regiment he abused more, and that was he himself. He never spoke a word to me again and gave me a wide berth. Once peace came, he took his leave at once and I never heard of him again until today. Give him my regards, Volunteer, and tell him I'm sincerely sorry for the wrong I did him, as I was at the time, but I'd also done something right in the matter, for there was no other possible way."

The old man fell silent. "Yes," said the Corporal, "that's all very well and good, but you haven't finished yet. What became of the others – the Major, the Colonel, the innkeeper?" "Oh," laughed the old man, "you're insatiable, but I want my supper; I'm hungry. Well, the Colonel would certainly have liked to do me an ill turn, but a few bullets at Dennewitz cured him of all earthly desires. The Major was shot to a cripple at the very same place, for it was hard fighting there; we lost thirty-three of our forty-five officers and around a thousand men. Two or three days after the battle, we came to that village where we'd been held prisoner; but village and inn and barn lay in ashes, there was nothing to be seen of the man and woman who saved us, and I never heard of them again. That's war." With those words, the old man stood up and took his cap.

"But the wager?" the recruit hastily asked. "Did Peter pay it?" "No," the drummer replied, "he didn't think about it and I didn't want to remind

him.” “But Good Lord!” the other cried in dismay, “so you got nothing out of it?” “No,” said the old man, and he walked out the door. The recruit shook his head; the others laughed.

Rolof the Recruit

The old drummer had not been seen for several days, and it was said that he had got so worked up during a quarrel at the guardhouse that he now lay sick at home. The Volunteer, in whom the rough, singular figure had inspired a real sympathy, went to visit him at his house on a sunny morning and found him in the garden, on the small balcony which was built on the town wall in the extensive shade of a walnut-tree. The old man, wrapped in his cloak, his field cap pulled down deep over his furrowed brow, was chatting with a comrade from earlier days who now earned a comfortable living as a respectable master craftsman. The two old men bid the visitor a cordial welcome as he stepped up, the drummer gave him his hand and pulled a bench up for a seat; and after the Volunteer had fetched out the bottle of wine he had brought along and filled the quickly produced glasses, they fell into lively conversation. The morning was still and lovely, the little spot full of shade and charm; one could see over the old fortifications, which had been razed and converted to public parks, into the calm, summery fields and meadows, and between the rows of tall, dense trees of a chaussée here, the meandering, flashing river there, and the so-called Spruce Hill in the foreground, a simple yet pleasant picture lay spread out to sight.

“Just look at this countryside, young sir,” said the drummer, having

turned to the Volunteer, who was looking out, "it's pretty here, and I have a quite particular fondness for this spot. Since the time when we came back from France to the garrison here after the peace – it will be twenty-five years now – I've lived here, knocked up the bench and table myself and fitted everything up as you see it. I feel I'm missing something if I can't be here for at least a moment every day." "Yes, yes," the Volunteer replied, smiling, "and when you're not here, Ralow, you seek out a place from where you can look here. I think I can make out the gnarled old trunk on Spruce Hill yonder, where I found you recently and was given the cold shoulder." The old man looked at him, surprised and silent. "It was you?" he asked after a while, his brow having darkened, "Well, I know nothing about that. I mustn't have recognised you, as I wasn't quite myself, but rather far away from the present, as happens to me now and then." "But Father, what problem is it that could torment you so?" asked the young man. "If you're ill, you need to take something, not wander wildly around on your own giving way to unpleasant thoughts. That won't do, Ralow. What's the matter with you?"

"What's the matter with me?" the old man replied, and a gloomy smile spread over his wrinkled, keen-featured face before losing itself in the corners of his suddenly flashing eyes. "I have forty years too many, as I can feel, and there's too much in this head. There's the old, hellish story which they recently tried to trip me up with at the guardhouse; you've heard about it, no doubt. A couple of fellows were chattering about the Black Dutchman and his son, Roloff, what bloodsuckers they had been, and I told them they should shut up about it or our sabres would have to do

the talking. Don't I have the right to speak like that? What do the Dutchman and Rolof have to do with them? What do they know about them? The villains were all still lying in the well at that time and the stork hadn't thought of them yet. Well, they did as they were told, for they have respect, that's true. But then one of them kept talking, like a washerwoman, about that, about me, behind my back, and that memory came back to me which the Devil can take away! – You love stories, Volunteer, I know," he continued, "and as this is one and we're sitting here quietly by ourselves, you can have it."

"Ralow," the addressee interrupted the agitated old man, "don't tell a tale now, old fellow. I didn't, God knows, come to you for curiosity's sake." "No," cried the old man, "I will tell you *this* story! You said earlier that it did no good to be alone and give way to unpleasant thoughts. By God, but that's true! I'm alone, and it's a miserable condition, which I'm only now learning to comprehend. Now the old stuff is here in my head again and I can't get rid of it; it gets me down, it's not for one person alone, and so I'll tell you it. And I should really tell it by night, for it's diabolical and not for the day, although when it happened, the sun was shining as clearly as now and the sky was just as it's gleaming through the leaves there. That's strange: when something like this happens, the sky should cloud over and thunder and lightning pour out. But it doesn't care about the happiness and sorrow of the worms on Earth. Well, comrades, I'll tell you now, by day and sunlight, for I'm afraid. Don't laugh, gentlemen," he added with a dark smile, "At that time, it drove me mad, and my soul lay in darkness, and the awful memory often gives me the feeling that the Devil could rule over me

once again. So out with it!"

He then lit his pipe, very slowly and methodically, as if he wished to compose himself, drank deeply, and steadily parted his moustache in the centre with his pipe; and after directing a fleeting glance at both his concerned listeners, he cast his eyes thoughtfully into the distance and began his tale.

"As you know, I don't come from this cursed sandbox, but from the sea, and my place of birth is a village on the strand, not more than a few leagues from S. It's only a good day's journey away from here, yet I haven't been back there for forty years, and so I can't say how the good old little place looks now. But at that time, the village was rich and bustling. It was full of ships and sailors, who were as brave and honest as any others in the world, for the sea there is a treacherous creature, now as smooth as milk, and the very next moment surging from a sudden gust of wind and howling as if there were thirty thousand score devils inside it. There, you need men such as our fellows were. Many sailed in the ships owned by the merchants of S., others followed the fishing trade, and others plied other trades at their own cost and hazard; for there was much to do in our village. Its harbour was exceptional, much more convenient than the one at S., even though it wasn't as large, and it wasn't anywhere near as exposed to the danger of silting up. For that reason, many a merchant set up a branch office in our village, while others even brought their entire business over, for the heavy ships which sailed to the Indies, to Brazil and thereabouts, all berthed in our harbour. Two or three consuls lived in our village, houses were built, warehouses erected, factories founded, and

there was a great deal of bustle and trade. However, something else came as well, which exerted just such a pull as the good harbour and was actually just as easily seen.

“At that time, we had the Excise in the land, and as there were as many deals going on in our village as take place only in other maritime towns, it came, understandably, to our place also. And it was a damned institution, strict and hard beyond measure. They raised the prices of wares, necessary though they were, so as to become unaffordable; and with their officers, they brought into our land a kind of men who were little loved from the outset and who, furthermore, did everything in their power to make themselves hated. The consequence of these newfangled arrangements was smuggling on an unheard-of scale, for people absolutely could not and would not do without the wares, and far less would they pay the custom duties. So smuggling flourished, and our village was the easiest place in the world for it, because it was open all around, and anything that made its way there could then go on to any land fairly unhindered. The harbour, as I said, was good and deep, the coast was virtually uninhabited for many miles and provided with many good spots for landing. So the officials in our village had well-nigh impossible duties to perform day after day and night after night, and almost always in vain, for everyone who, so to speak, had a nose and ears, with the exception of the officers – and often not even with that exception – was involved in smuggling. However, everything still went along okay, as long as our people, who were uncouth, admittedly, but good-natured nonetheless, were the only ones occupied in this way, and except for the occasional

scrap, which barely led to more than aching heads and backs, the officers had to endure little more than words and gestures. But that changed when around the time of my birth, lured by the rising reputation of our village, merchants and dealers from foreign lands settled with us and brought foreign seamen with them who knew about smuggling in other lands and soon put their hands to it here. The tremendous profit brought more and more people over to us, stout sailors, but wild companions, who didn't give a damn about a man's life. One such of these was Jan van der Kerken, commonly called the Dark Dutchman because of his black hair and his dark complexion.

At first he came with a cargo of prohibited goods which he brought on land; then he stayed, built a house, put a lugger on the stocks, and figured as the captain of a lighter in the authorities' books, while in actual fact he was the first and best smuggler in the village. He fared as the other foreigners did; only, this man built a greater reputation for himself than anyone else did and inspired a diabolical hatred, but, at the same time, no lesser a fear, in the customs officials. There is much lying in the world, and what one man has or is, gossiping tongues increase thousandfold. And so the Dark Dutchman was certainly not everywhere he was supposed to have been; there were plenty other fellows in our village who were on the job day and night and knew how to handle a knife and a gun. But Jan was said to be the leader, and that was that; for the sharpest bloodhounds strove in vain to follow his track, and – this is certain – especially since his arrival, the officers had disappeared like flies in autumn. The guards at single or double posts were often gone after a rainy or stormy night; and

detachments being posted and sent because of that, the Devil fetched many a man of them as well. And no longer were the people brought home with a hole in their head, where they nicely named the doer of the deed and then died, or were found rigid and cold at their post on the strand on a misty morning; no, now, they had gone, without a trace, and nobody knew what their end had been, or where their grave had been dug. God have mercy on the poor souls.

“Things went on in this way for many a year. Nobody could ever prove anything against Jan, for he was never caught, even a single time, and had no accomplices; he sailed his lugger alone or only with the occasional help of sailors from foreign ships who brought goods to be smuggled. The greenhorns – that was what we called the officers, because of their uniform – hated him worse than the plague, the authorities looked on him with no kindly eye, and nobody loved him, except the women, almost all of whom he had in a net. At the time he came to us he was no boy any longer, and now he was loaded with many more years and hardships. He was a strong, bony man, and not handsome, torn by smallpox, and browned and beaten by the weather; his eyes always looked wild and grim, his speech was hard and rough; it was said of his earlier life that he had either traded in human flesh or practised piracy in distant waters; his current activity brought the name of a sorcerer upon him – and nevertheless he had his choice of lass – and his choice landed on my sister.

“My parents did not like the Dutchman and flatly refused him their daughter’s hand in marriage; then Marie went into his house and declared

she was staying with him, married or not. To avoid the disgrace so wild a life would bring upon their honourable grey heads, our parents gave in. But they did not visit my sister, and she and her husband did not visit us until, after many years, Marie gave birth to her first and only child. On the day of the christening, my parents were seen in their son-in-law's house for the first time, happy and overjoyed with their sturdy grandson; Marie was elated and breezy as a boat's pennant; Jan, holding the boy in his arms, made his first and last attempt to smile, in the process cutting a grimace as if he'd swallowed wormwood.

“Two years later, I packed up my bundle and went to the regiment. I had never particularly been one for the sea, and ever since we became so closely tied to the Dutchman I'd felt almost a horror for the life. So I cleared off, and when I beat the last dust of my hometown out of my frize jacket in the quarters the next morning, I thought I was now free from all its wild doings. But our fate is not decided up high in accordance with the thoughts of men.

“In the meantime, many a year passed before I went home again, and there was nothing there which gave me the desire to stay for long, so I returned to the garrison earlier than I had actually intended and even before my leave was up. Then I thought of my next visit as little as possible until, some time later, a longing for the sea, for my mother and sister, came over me and drove me there almost against my will. But I found little, or nothing at all, to gladden the heart; my brother-in-law's reputation got worse year by year, and his moroseness, his rough, wild, unbearable nature waxed in equal measure. My old mother crossed and blessed

herself at every word about him; my sister was sorrowful and had almost become an old woman since grief and care had come to house with her instead of the merriment of that first time, and the only fresh face, the only light heart, were those of the child, the boy Rolof, a being just after God's heart, as a boy has to be, free and joyful, spirited and bold, strong and indefatigable. He was the only person there who could to some extent keep company and talk with the father, who put up with more from him than from any other human being, and I saw him, more than once, looking at the boy and talking about him with a certain pleasure. And yet, in spite of this love, he would not have the boy, who was subject to military duty, absolved and his name entered as a sailor. In vain did I advise him to do this every time I visited, for the sea was the boy's cradle, home, and life. "Folly!" said Jan in his strong foreign accent, "it's a long time yet until his time comes, and then they'll be terribly mistaken if they think to get hold of him. I'm not doing the beasts the favour of asking for something that they can and will refuse me."

"Meanwhile, the time was no longer so far away, and when I looked around at home again in Year Two, Rolof was already eighteen years old and was on the point of being levied. And it happened that the boy stole my heart, clean away, and he settled down in this breast and in this head in its place. All the days of my life, I've had no other love but him, only him in the world, however far my feet have taken me and my hands beat the drumsticks.

"But he was a splendid lad, and never and nowhere had God's sun shone on a better one. The whole village said that, house after house; and

you heard the same sentiment along the entire coast. He was a young man whose like has seldom been seen in the world and our Lord creates only in a special hour. I've never known anyone come close to him, neither in efficiency in his trade, nor in joyfulness and boldness of heart, nor in friendliness of disposition. He had a blessed nature: whatever he tackled was done rightly and stylishly, whatever he undertook succeeded, whatever he did, he did in its entirety, to the utmost, and nobody could find any fault with him. And that came about, I think, because to everything he did and said, he brought his whole, honest heart, the pure and certain conviction that he was in the right and was doing good. Where that is the case, a man may err, but in the eyes of the Almighty his guilt is sure to meet with mercy.

“Yes, you should have seen him, the sturdy and so slender figure with a small head on a powerful neck, when he lithely and nimbly climbed up the ropes to the mast; no squirrel could do it faster; or when he hoisted the heavy sail as though he were toying with it, or when he stood at the whip-staff, cool and thoughtful, or cheerful and light-hearted, while the seabreeze howled around him and the waves sprayed him with foam. You should have seen him, the first at games and in dancing, the first for jests and folly, the one who led the way in every danger, always with like courage and like merriness.

“If you had but heard him when he narrated some mad escapade, told about his voyages, or span out a yarn; for his language, his way of telling were quite unique, different from what I've always found in other people of our region and our station. There was something so wondrous

and strange in it; it was so simple, and yet it grabbed you by the heart; it came out so splendidly, and yet made your eyes moist. Where he got this from, whether from inside himself, or from the depths of the sea, or from the heights of the heavens, whither he could look for hours when his lugger glided over the water – only God knows. I can't put a name to it or describe it to you, but it often reminded me of the old verses and songs which you could still hear the young folk singing in the evening, now and then, on the strand in the days of my youth.

“He was a sailor, body and soul; that was quite welcome to me, for people are variously gifted. However, he was also a smuggler by nature, and I could never be happy about that. He had become a dear, dear lad, he warmly attached himself to me, his uncle, and did everything he believed would be dear and pleasant to me. So I spoke with him about the folly of his trade; I sought to persuade him to go into distant parts, give up his doings hereabouts and become a real, able, honest seaman. A fat lot of good that did. “Uncle,” said Rolof, “I won't do it, I can't do it; I'm not leaving home and this life. I'm like the sea-eagle: if he doesn't have his bath in the water and his fight every day, he wastes away. I'd die if I had to endure those sleepy voyages on board a merchant-ship, eating my peas with salted meat, or my salted meat with peas, living, and doing, and thinking the same things day after day. There's a fire in me which burns and blazes, and if I don't give it any fuel, it will burn me up.” “Then go to Holland, to England,” I admonished; “there's war everywhere, your father knows plenty of people, and you can't fail to get a berth on a man-of-war and to advance; for I know, you crazy lad, that you're made of the right stuff, and

I'm fond of you, you knave, and I think you could do anything."

"He threw his arms around my neck and his black eyes sparkled, as bright and enticing as the will-o'-the-wisp. "Uncle," he cried, "what would I do there? Don't you know that the eagle is a proud companion who feels at ease only in the free air? He won't let himself be locked up and trained like a hound, he'll rather bang his head open against the bars. No, if I'm to come to something and do something, I have to stand on my own feet, be able to work with freedom for me and mine. Self do, self have! – that's my motto." "And it's worthless," I countered, "for it's a lie, as you can never bring anything to completion without other people." "Be that as it may," he replied, "I'm just not going, I'm sticking to my trade, I don't want to be far away from the three old ones and from –" He broke off. "A-ha!" I put in. "So there's the rub? Is there some sweetheart there too, boy?" "Why hide it from you?" he briskly replied. "Yes, there's Marie from Land's End. We're to wait two more years; then the old man will hand his boat over to me, so I can earn my own bread."

"The young man had no bad taste, for she was the trimmest and prettiest lass far and wide, a creature in whom you could see her foreign French father: a slender body, a lissom build, delicate but sinewy limbs, brownish complexion and black eyes and hair on a small head. Later, in France, among the Walloons, I found many like her. She suited Rolof like oil to the fire, but she was a delightful, smashing girl and nobody knew anything but good about her.

"Alright," I said, "that may be so; and it would have surprised me if the two of you hadn't come across each other. So you want all of that, and

yet you won't procure the damned passport for yourself? You're eighteen years old now, how long will it be before they fetch you? For they certainly won't forget you, rely on it!" "They won't find me, Uncle," he replied with a laugh, "and even if they did, they wouldn't get me, I'm far too quick for them." "And so," I said angrily, "from sheer pride, you'll speak no friendly words and rather live the rest of your life in fear and worry?"

"Bah!" he cried, "I don't care about it so much. And I never ask where I know that it's in vain."

"Thus did we chat and argue one fine afternoon, while we sat on some bales in the harbour. Whatever I might say, it was all in vain, and later on, when Jan came along and broke in with his customary rudeness, that was the end of it: my choler was up, and in the end I cried out, hopping mad, "Then may the Devil fetch the both of you! But mark my words, in a year, this lad will be marching to my drum, as sure as the three of us are together here. But I won't show any mercy either then, I'll tell you; for such pride is more than sinful, it's stupid, it can have only bad consequences, and what will happen, Jan, that will be on your mad head." "Damn your eyes! Yes, on *my* head!" the swarthy one replied grimly and menacingly. "I've been carrying it some time now, and I'd like to see who's against me." With that, he thrust his hands into his pockets and went on board. Rolof sought to placate me, my mother and sister pleaded with me, but the next morning I set out. I was wild with rage at the stupidity of this beast of a Dutchman and from fear for the future. For I saw quite clearly that it *could not* turn out well. And I loved Rolof – I loved him!

"A year passed, and then another, and Rolof did not come; but I did

not forget that evening or our talk, even though the events of those days left me little time for memories. If you're familiar with the course of those times, you'll know that the French attacked Austria and Russia in the year '05 and that our army was mobilised also. However, we musketeers of M- did not join the army; instead, we were away from -g as early as the beginning of summer and were gradually transferred ever deeper inside the country, until we moved into the region hereabouts in September, where a small observation corps was to be formed. We received our quarters in this town; the Major of the Second Battalion had his residence in the house there, and I, as Master Drummer, lived here, to be precise, in the garret which the two musketeers now occupy. In the meantime, we were assiduously brought back to full strength – dysentery had cost us many men – recruits after recruits were enlisted, were zealously given blows, to bring them up to scratch all the sooner, and everything went forward nicely. The Major was one of the old sort, haughty as the Devil and sharp as a new currycomb. He had us do drills and duties day after day, early and late, without letting us catch our breath or reflect. It was hard, aye, but the service ran like clockwork, as I've never seen it since. And that is, after all, the most important thing.

“One morning, we had been doing our duties, then roll-call was held, and after that I saw our Major talking with the Colonel, then with the Captain of the Fifth – my – company, and immediately afterwards I was called to him. He was seldom unfriendly to me, and on this occasion, he was as little so as he could ever possibly be. “Listen, fellow,” he said, good-naturedly pulling my left side-curl. “You're no animal like the others,

but a reliable, well-groomed man, and so you'll carry out the order I give you. Since yesterday evening, a chap has been sitting in the hole, who comes from your village and has recently been captured. The scoundrel wanted to evade service, and he fought like a bear, almost beat the corporal of the detachment to death, broke a musket in pieces and got up to other mischief. Now he lies there like a wildcat, won't open his mouth, won't touch either food or drink. Actually, we'll have to chastise him, in accordance with the rules, but the Colonel wants someone to speak to him first, for he's a smart, strapping fellow, the like of which we can never have too many of. So go there and talk with him any way you think will work. Tell the creature from me that if he hasn't become mannerly and human by tomorrow, I'll chastise him and have him lashed until he's as tender and soft as my glove."

"Very well," I replied indifferently, for this kind of event often occurred, and my head was rather muddled in the mornings, so I couldn't think to the other side of the road. And I went off, came to the watch-house, into the doghouse, and there – yes, there sat the boy, on the ground, with chains on his arms and legs, his clothes tattered, his hair dishevelled, his face full of blood, his eyes firmly shut and his teeth so firm and sharp in his lips that blood glistened forth.

"Then I lost it; the blood rose to my head and an almost inhuman fury took hold of me. "Ha, scoundrel!" I yelled, seizing his shoulders and shaking him like a child. "Has it now come to pass, what I always told you and that devil, your old man? Has pride come a cropper, are you now subdued like a boasting knave? Yes, you – I could murder you, murder

you! Once so great, and now so small! Why did our Lord give you a sound and healthy mind only for you to spoil it so frivolously?"

"I no longer know what I said further, I've never known, I was mad; and when I finally regained my five senses, when I saw him sitting there before me, his eyes open now and fixed on me – firm, serious, threatening, pleading, tired to death – everything that a pair of eyes can say when madness is circling around your head, and they were *his* eyes, Rolof's, he who was dearer to me than my lifeblood, in spite of everything – when I saw his honest, outer man so contemptibly filthy and disordered – I burst out into shining tears. Yes, look at me how you will, I'll say it and not be ashamed – I, Ralow, the strong, sober, sensible fellow, I wept like a woman, almost inconsolably, and wrung my hands, completely at a loss what to do. "Rolof!" I cried, throwing my arms around his neck and hugging and holding him, and never did his mother press him to her breast, cradle him in her arms, with a more feeling heart, "Rolof, you infernal good-for-nothing, you come to me like this and bring such a wretched sight before my eyes?"

"Yes, just look at me, Uncle," he said grimly, and *he* did not weep; "it's me, me, Rolof van der Kerker, your sister's son, the free man, who sits here before you like a criminal, beaten, dishevelled, in chains, yes, in irons like a mutineer, like a dog. And yet all I did was defend my right, my freedom, my right!" "Indeed?" I rejoined, looking gravely and fixedly into his burning eyes, "so now it has become your right, what was nothing but your sheer folly! Aren't you a subject of the state? Aren't you subject to military duty? Do you want to have an advantage over the rest of us? Do you want

to have new laws only for you? Boy, your father's mad school is speaking out of you."

"He had lowered his eyes before my gaze for a minute; but when I fell silent, he raised them again, and his words were wild: "I don't want new laws, I only want the ones we have to apply to me as well as they do to others. In what way are the high lords, the nobles, the citizens superior to us, we who live in a village instead of in a city, and in a hut instead of in a castle? I'm a free man just as much as them, and subject to nobody, I'm the only child of my parents and as good a sailor as any of those boasters, and a better one, though I haven't loafed around on the North Sea for years. And now in irons!"

"Yes," I said, "from your way of speaking, the state would have no soldiers at all, or only an assembled riff-raff, as was the case in past ages. And then, I think, you've forgotten that the blame for all your trouble lies with you alone, for the law allows you to get a passport and follow your will. Yield, Rolof, yield! It was your want of sense and your old man's folly, that's what it was."

"The sharp brows over his eyes almost touched each other when he leapt up, making his chains rattle, and answered me: "And if that's the law, Uncle, then let it apply to everyone, without favour, without preference, without falseness. What good is the law to me, when I know that it doesn't hold good for me in my home? They give me a passport! They, give it to the son of *my* father! Oh! Fire and brimstone! Let me laugh, Uncle! They, who would rather devour themselves than do us a favour, than give us our right! And you speak of soldiers? If the King, if the state must have

soldiers, then as far as I'm concerned, let them take them from among the bondsmen, the serfs, who couldn't have it worse anywhere outside their hovels, and would thank God if they could get away; or they might enlist those who report of their own free will, of whom there will always be enough; or they should take us, as we are, nobleman, citizen, peasant, high and low, all who are capable. But it doesn't happen like that. It goes according to rank and station, to fortune, favour, and finances. And now, Uncle, what should I do for her? What do I care about the state? What has she given me, that I should serve and slave away for her for twenty years, let myself be trained and fatigued like a dog, waste my youth, ruin my strength, lose all my happiness and life so she will allow me to acquire the little patch of earth, for my precious money, where I'll build my house? By God, that's a Jewish barter! And because I defended my freedom, my right – for that, in irons!"

“So it went on, always the same. You mustn't believe that what I'm telling you was everything; I can't pass all that on to you, I've forgotten a great deal. There was much in his words that was wrong and grossly exaggerated and quite blasphemous, but there was just as much that was also good and true, which had passed through my mind when I had thought about this and that in idle hours, and which later often came to pass just as the poor fellow had said. And there he stood before me, so very tall and proud in spite of his fetters and rags, that a proper feeling of reverence took hold of me. And yet he was only a young, beardless man, my equal in birth and station, which is to say a nothing, a mad, wild creature who had never looked much into books and barely ever gone to

school. That's just how Rolof was.

“And none of it does you a bit of good,” I said at last, “and the upshot of it all is your having to march to my drum. You can thank your old man and yourself for that! Your folly has landed you in the soup.” Then he was suddenly rigid and cold, as he had been at first; he walked up to me, grasped my hands as firmly as though he would crush them, and said, “Never mind – if it's the case that we're to blame, arguing won't change that. But Uncle, what am I to do here? What do they want with me? It can't and can't come to a good end, for I know myself. Out on the sea, I'm as good as anyone, I'm better; here on land, I'm worse than the worst. I could have been of some use there, and here I can only do harm, to myself and to others; there I was the first, and here I'll be the last. The man who has swallowed wind and water all his life will suffocate on dust; the man who has learned to walk on the planks will never thrive on the hard earth. And then I'm supposed to go away from the sea, do you understand that, Uncle? Do you understand and feel what it means when we have to leave the open air to go inside walls, to go from the wild and varied rushing and surging of the water into the dreary mundanity of the land, from the brisk and merry seaman's trade, where taking risks is the order of the day, where dangers constantly appear, where there's always only little to be won, but everything to be lost – away from there into the uniformity and the monotony of the training and the pipeclay-service¹³ here, in short out of life into death! And my having to go from freedom into servitude, not for one

¹³ Pointless military drill with an excessive attention to cleanliness.

year or two, or three – but for fifteen, twenty, for a whole human lifetime, away from the sea, from my parents, from my girl, from all happiness, all prospects and hopes, with no return, for ever and always! For I'll never live to see the end of all this. And because I fought against it, I'm in irons! Yes, and I myself am to blame, I, I!"

"Then the floodgates were opened again, and it burst forth like a torrent, laments and complaints, curses and invectives, threats, hatred, fury and bitterness at himself, all in a jumble, without moderation, without purpose, indescribable and inconceivable. And then he shook his chains with a more than human force; I thought they must fall off him like dust. And then he was standing there again, Rolof still, in spite of the rags, blood, and dirt. I tremble at the memory now, and at the time I sat like a broken man, senseless, incapable of moving or of pulling myself together, with the sole thought: this is what I feared, what made me furious and moved me to tears. Yes, it was a wild lament, and it, with my having foreseen all this, almost broke my heart.

"Nevertheless, Rolof had gradually talked himself calmer, so that I too could return to my senses and start thinking. I had to lead him away from this conversation, I saw clearly, and so I asked him how the disaster had come about, how he had so hot-headedly run into the trap with the sea before him and his good ship under him? At first, he wouldn't or couldn't answer, as something else always came up; but in the end he gave in and said, "There's nothing strange about it, no more to it than my folly and thoughtlessness." He then told me how he had lived at home but little throughout these last years, having rather, for the most part, been in

England and Holland, to find an opportunity, a position, where he could earn his bread. However, what had presented itself had not really pleased him, and so he had returned with a smuggler a few days ago, without having effected his purpose. His father had told him about inquiries which had been conducted in the meantime; now everything was indeed safe, the unit having gone, but he should come on land only in the evening for the time being and leave again in winter. For two days all had been well, but on the third evening he had been attacked near the Chief Auditor's house, had fought his way out, but had been pursued and overpowered in a new fight. "And now here I am, Uncle," he concluded, "in irons, in irons! But the Chief Auditor, the miserable cur, will also feel what an iron sword has to say. That's my comfort."

"That's unchristian, Rolof," I said, although I knew fine well that my words were in vain and the official's life wasn't worth thruppence now; "that's unchristian, lad. He may have had no part in the trick; for Corporal Heinzel is an old, sly, wily bird, and quite capable of catching you without any help from others." "For that, he is keeping his bed now," the youth replied, "and he won't forget me. But the Chief Auditor, the dog, I recognised in spite of his disguise, and I've had it told to my father. He is to save him for me and preserve him as carefully as his eyesight, for the fellow is mine, mine, and woe betide anyone who lays a hand on him! For Uncle, understand me," he continued, and he shook his chains like a madman, "where *these* bite into flesh that is not used to them and is not meant for them, that's the end of God and Christianity and only the Devil rules. Yes – in irons, !! I won't forget this, even should I live to see the Day

of Judgement!”

“Yes, the chains! They did not only cut into his arms and legs, they had pressed their way into his life, into his soul, and they had, in a manner of speaking, completely enveloped him. All my persuasion could not be but vain; I realised that and so kept silent and let him speak. But when I saw him gradually becoming calmer, I began to talk of the near future, how he would have to submit and bear his fate like a man; I depicted to him the soldier’s life, the service, his new duties, in as mild and good a light as I possibly could without openly lying. I told him that although there was no hope of being released, there remained the possibility that the Colonel, who evidently wished him well, would let him go in two or three years. Intransigence and defiance would do no good at all, on the contrary, they could, they must only make his lot worse; if he reconciled himself to what had happened, peacefully and manfully, declared himself ready to serve the King as a loyal and honest soldier, then I would warrant that he, if not this evening, yet certainly tomorrow morning, would get out of the irons and also soon be freed from the detention cell. Only his unseemly behaviour had brought all of this upon him. There was nothing else the matter, for the soldier’s coat would cover the other things. The Corporal was not dead, and in this line one often took a hefty blow to the head. There was also nothing the Corporal could say, for Rolof was coming to my company, where the Captain wished me well, where the sergeants and corporals had grown old with me.

“None of them will make your life a misery,” I concluded. “You’ll live with me, you’ll have my help and guidance, and the Devil must have a

finger in the pie if we can't turn out a life for ourselves that will put even you in good spirits. Shake on it, Rolof! A little goodwill and common sense, and things will be better than we thought, and in particular, you'll get out of those damned irons." "It's not that, Uncle," he said, shaking his head. "It's all the same to me whether I get rid of these things or keep wearing them. But where they have once sat, and be it only for the time it takes to raise an oar, the bones hurt from it until they've decayed, and I'll feel it as long as I have a thought in my head."

"We spoke back and forth in this way, and when I finally departed, the end was no tolerable one, let alone a good one. Yet I had to be satisfied that I'd brought him to a certain rest, that he would take food and drink, that the Corporal of the Guard had promised to look after him and see that he had a bed fit for a human being for the night. I had spoken brightly and cheerily to him, but God knows my mood was anything but that and when I thought of our Major and what he had said, I was dreadfully anxious. Something had to be done, even by me, poor, low fellow that I was, and so I went to the Captain. He was a humane man, not married, handsomely full and broad, a lion to the enemy, a good eater and even better drinker at home, and the enemy of not a single soul. He was well disposed towards me, for I had once saved his life in days gone by. A word put in by him counted for much and he was our Colonel's brother. So I could hope for the best from him.

"When I came to him, he was just about to go out, yet he admitted me. "What's the matter?" he asked, "Have you seen a ghost, Ralow? You look as white as the wall." "I've come from the detainee, Sir," I replied.

“Yes, yes, I know,” he said. “Well, what’s the madman up to? He seems to be possessed by the very devil. Is he cooling off?” “He is my sister’s son, Sir.” “What?” he cried, and he threw his hat onto the table, “Your nephew! Poor fellow! Come here and tell me about it; the society can wait.” Then my heart opened and I poured out what was inside. He listened to me in silence, came to a halt before me from time to time, shook his head, then resumed pacing up and down. “Bad! bad!” he murmured at last, when I had fallen silent. “How can the fellow imagine himself to be so abandoned by God and man? There’s not much that can be done. A release is out of the question. Speak with the Major and ask him for permission to speak with the Colonel. I’ll put in a word for you with him this evening. He shall get out of the chains, I promise you, for I can imagine that such things mortify a respectable chap. Go and do as I’ve said, and I’ll do likewise.” Would to God he had been less good-natured and honest, and not honour personified from top to toe. With another captain – and there were more than one such in those days – a tidy sum of money would have settled the matter as we wished. There was no chance of that here. I thanked him and took myself off. The Major gave me even less comfort; he stuck to his threat of that morning and refused to enter into any further discussion.

“On the following morning, I threw myself into my best uniform, went to the guard-house and visited the poor young man. The evening before, his chains had been taken off on the Colonel’s command; he had cleaned himself and restored his torn clothes as well as he possibly could; the food, the sleep, the rest which had followed the long conversation with me, the removal of the irons, all of these had done him good and visibly made him

a new man. But there was still no talk of yielding, of voluntarily joining up. That worried me but little, and when it seemed to me to be the right time, I went to the Colonel, to try one more time if I could not completely extricate him and send him back to his trade. Admittedly, an obstacle in my way was my never, all my born days, having known how to ask properly; when I had described the matter, that was it – over – whether refusal or approval ensued. It's just the way I was brought up.

“The Colonel was an old man, probably twenty years older than his brother, the Captain, and always quiet and serious, as long as I saw him; but there was a rumour about him going round, that he had been one of the wildest hotheads in the army in past times and an exceptional favourite of old Seydlitz.¹⁴ Consequently, it might now be the case that he still took pleasure in particularly choice pranks as long as they were not directly against the service and its regulations, and would tend to forgive a man who distinguished himself before others in this way or that, but with a good grace, as often as possible. I counted on that, for Rolof had not his like on this Earth, and the Colonel already knew about him.

“When I entered, he was sitting on the sofa and reading the newspapers; but on seeing me, he rose to his feet, buttoned up his uniform and came up to me, his hat on his head and his tall, gaunt figure carelessly bent forward, as he tended to do so long as he was in a good mood. “You would be Drummer Ralow of the Fifth Company?” he asked me. “Yes, Sir,” I said. “How long have you served?” “Coming up to twenty years.” “You

¹⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm, Baron von Seydlitz (1721-1773), distinguished Prussian cavalry commander.

wish to talk to me concerning your nephew, the young fellow who made such unholy mischief? Your Captain has told me about the two of you. Tell me all about it, Drummer,” he continued, his large brown eyes flashing at me all the while and making me awfully hot under the collar; for in those days, such a commander was no mere man like us but a hundred times greater, and he filled me with a greater sense of respect than His Majesty the King himself.

“But there was nothing for it, I had to speak, and so I plucked up my courage and bluntly narrated everything about Rolof’s life and doings, about his character and his nature, about my love for him and my advice, and his folly, his wrathful words. I did not keep back a single word of all that I knew, and that was actually everything, because my memory has always been good and solid. His most disgraceful deeds can do him no harm here, I thought, and when talking about the fight he was in before his capture, I didn’t leave out a single blow, a single leap – nothing.

“All this time, the Colonel paced up and down the room in total silence, his hands on his back, now stopping before me, now flashing a smile at me and asking, “Did he say, did he do that?”, now only nodding his head so that his long queue waggled and saying: “That is decidedly a man of soul! A man of soul!” He must have said that some ten or twelve times, which is why I remember it, although I didn’t properly understand it and only took it to be a real accolade. Finally, when I had finished and fallen silent, he came up to me, clapped me on the shoulders and said, “Now, a man who narrates so neatly and fluently, I suppose he’ll think the same, when all’s said and done?” I was frightened to death and could only

stammer: "Sir —" "Now, don't worry, Ralow," he continued with a laugh, "I'm not displeased. Now listen, your nephew is a real man and a charming fellow, how can he follow so villainous and ignominious a trade as smuggling? Why, it is nothing more than theft and deception." "Begging your pardon, Colonel," I replied, "in that region they don't consider it to be such, and they are all smugglers more or less." "But the boy is not like all the others!" he cried, "au contraire, show me just one more like him among all the bullheads in your hometown! In short, the fellow must give it up, and for that reason it's a good thing, in a way, for him to enter the service and live a regular, lawful life. I would gladly do something for him, but I cannot and will not release him; he can gain honour with us, the boy, he just has to put his shady trade out of his mind as well as those cranky ideas of marriage, and he will become a good soldier first, and then, several years later, a good man. I shall not hold on to him for long; neither his life nor his career shall be lost."

"Begging your pardon, Colonel," I said, "but I must observe that the boy has been unaccustomed to the land from an early age and has never learned to march in his life." "Stuff and nonsense, Drummer!" he earnestly replied, "what do you know about it? Whoever is capable at one job and no fool in other respects, will not be a bungler in all other ones." "But," I continued, for I had gradually grown quite free-spoken and bold in the course of the long conversation, "the boy is mostly afraid that the service is the same monotonous thing every day, it doesn't have the liveliness of going now over the smooth sea, now through storm and danger, like his ship." "Indeed?" he replied with a smile, "does he think so? That's definitely

my man! But he can take comfort, for God willing, we'll soon have it lively enough again, perhaps livelier than he may like. I'll see him, Ralow," he concluded, "and talk to him myself. Take the orderly with you and bring him here from the guardhouse."

"We went and fetched the youth, who remained cold and indifferent to the honour that had been shown him, and accepted my advice regarding his speech and behaviour in silence. When we entered, the Commander, who had resumed his seat, bid him walk over and inspected him, not with dissatisfaction as it seemed to me, from top to toe. Rolof boldly looked him in the eye and did not twitch nor tremble. "This is your nephew, Ralow?" the Colonel asked at last, "and he almost struck the Corporal dead? But he is a child, a mere child. Drummer, you are dismissed; I wish to talk with him alone."

"So I took myself off and sat on the banister outside in anguish. I never did learn what they conferred together, but it lasted almost two hours. Then the youth came out, still rather sorrowful, to be sure, but no longer so cold and hard. The orderly brought me word that all was now in order and I could take him back to the guardhouse now. On the way, he said, "It's over, Uncle, I'm joining the service." Those were his only words, and I learned nothing further, nor did I like to ask him. In the afternoon, he came out of detention and was assigned to my company, on the next morning he was kitted out, on the day after that he had to swear the oath, and from the following Monday he took part in drills with the other recruits.

"And so his story was like a hundred others, only with a different beginning, which was of course known only to few; little was therefore

spoken about it, apart from our Major saying at parade the first afternoon, such a fuss was being made over the villain, as if he were a squire and not just a low-down villain. Now, that was his manner and I didn't hold it against him; and I didn't dare to.

“A time now began which I have but little to say about. It flowed by as it always flies away with the usual, albeit strict, service, in daily exercises, cares, and conversations. All went very well with Rolof. I had, as you may imagine, had a word with his near superiors, the sergeant, the NCOs and the corporals, and the result of this was that they took him very soundly, but less roughly, to task than tended to be the case with our recruits at that time. And Rolof was a wonderful soul, who needed no harsh words, let alone a palpable reminder of his duty. Even step and turn, closing ranks and falling in line seemed innate to him and only slightly forgotten; he learnt rifle drill, loading and shooting in accordance with military rules, at a canter, and in the end he had finished everything in a shorter space of time than anyone had ever heard of. On the day he was admitted to the regiment, he was the smartest fellow I've seen in my life. By Heaven! As spruce and elegant as a doll, as neat as a pin. Everything fitted him to a T, without his having taken any pains over it; he shone and flashed without having polished even half as much as the others. And so his superiors were satisfied with him, from the Corporal, who smiled contentedly, up to the Captain, who called him the smartest fellow in the regiment. The Major, admittedly, said not a word when inspecting him, but the Colonel ordered that he was, if he bore himself well, to be commandeered as his orderly at Easter. Rolof went red for delight and I

could have jumped for joy, for only the best people were taken to be orderlies, and those in particular who were soon to be given leave of absence or discharged. In short, the wonder-boy had everyone here in his pocket and fortune was smiling on him.

“The day ended just as merrily as it had begun, for I had prepared a feast for him that evening, where about a dozen half-jovial, yet half-respectable companions came together. And Rolof was, as they say, the soul of us. For he seemed to have gradually rediscovered his cheerfulness in these two or three months and now he raised everyone’s spirits with it. He was full of fancies and tricks, yet they were never malicious nor stupid; he laughed, he teased, he trifled and blustered; he did his service as though it were a pastime, and he was everyone’s favourite – the officers, the corporals, and the soldiers. Only every now and then, when we were sitting before our little stove in the twilight, alone and silent, as one doesn’t always have company and can’t talk all the time, when the small peat-flames slipped and darted amongst each other in a bluish light and the stars outside glittered through the frozen windows, then melancholy and homesickness came over him. But as soon as this happened – and I noticed it right away, as he was rarely out of my sight and never out of my mind – I quickly stepped in with this and that and did not leave off until I’d driven the devil of memory out willy-nilly. It was worse those few times when he met acquaintances, perhaps fellow smugglers, from our hometown, who clung to him like limpets. But he told me about it in all honesty, and I could easily bring him to let them go. I feared the worst for spring, when it starts to thaw and ships begin to sail; for such a regular

sea-dog being far from the sea is like a bird of passage in captivity: they are both biding their time. But I also had the hope that we would set out then and move deeper inland, and this would drive his silly fancies away.

“So time passed, and we were already in the last days of January in the year 1806. It had been a keen winter up to then, snow lay heaped-up and frost had hardened the ground and covered the river with a solid blanket for months without a break. But now the weather shifted all of a sudden, there were a few dull days with a lukewarm wind from the southwest and warm rain, the snow disappeared as though licked away, the ice began to crack and the water rose high over it. On the next day, there was spring weather, with a powerful thaw, and the sky was blue and the sun beaming; and trees and bushes looked lively enough to shoot out buds at any moment. You’re looking at me, surprised, because I know all this so precisely. But I also know the date, gentlemen, and it doesn’t look like I’ll ever forget it. The twenty-seventh of January, and, if I’m not mistaken, a Monday.

“When we, Rolof and I, got out of our beds on the morning of that day, he walked up to the window which you see there through the trees, and opening it, he looked out as usual. “This will be a blessed day,” he said; “Come and look out, Uncle, it’s like spring. In this weather the sea will be up in eight days and they can be off again.” “Yes, yes,” I hastily replied, “and we can march as well; I think there’ll be some kind of little war with Bonaparte in the summer.” “May God give us it!” he responded, and we chatted on until it was time to get dressed for service. Just as I was taking my uniform from its nail, the door opened and the Duty Corporal, who was

a good friend of mine, handed a letter from our hometown to Rolof, the first and last he ever received. It was from his betrothed, who was a bright girl and had good school-knowledge. But neither of us could read written characters, so we hurried to our host, who had to read the letter out to us. You can imagine how we felt when we heard that a few days ago, in the morning, and in the timber-yard where Rolof had been captured, a kind of scaffold made of poles and beams had been seen, and the Chief Auditor's body dangled from it. People had of course thought Jan to be the culprit, but he had been in S. at that very time and only just returned. For the rest, they were all sad about Rolof and wanted to see him, and whatever else is usually said in such letters.

“When he heard about the death of the wretched man who had betrayed him, I heard his teeth gnashing, and the blood rose tempestuously to his brow; but he said nothing, became ever more tight-lipped, and only when we were back in our room and I said, “O, that's a terrible thing!” did he remark, “It's well deserved, but I wish they'd saved the worm for me.” Then he leaned far out of the window, as if he would cool his brow and breast. After some time, he spoke again, without turning round: “How mournfully the poor, dear heart writes! You can feel from her words that her head is heavy with tears. Yes, when will we see each other again? And how prettily and accurately she can paint a picture! – I can really see the ‘Searose’ before me with her slender poles and her sails spread out to dry off. God knows, my ship! you too will look around for me when it's time to set out in eight days. But Rolof takes his gun,” he continued, putting the deed to the words while laughing out loud, “and

walks to the guardhouse.”

“My heart trembled at his words, for I had a foreboding that the youth might make a disastrous resolve. “Rolof!” I said, gripping him by the arm when he was about to leave, “do you remember that you’ve sworn loyalty to your King and are bound to the colours?” He looked at me wide-eyed and shook his head, laughing. “What are you thinking of, Uncle?” he asked. “Sadly, that’s the way it is, and that’s why I’m staying. Without my oath, I’d long have been away.” “Then go!” I said, and since then I’ve repented my damned, over-hasty words, “it’s time, boy!” And he went; he did his fourth guard-duty that day.

“Afterwards I saw him standing in line, as smart as ever; in the afternoon, when I spoke to him for a moment, he was full of high spirits. So I wished him a good guard-duty and went on my way. At that time, the town still had its fortifications, but they were already badly dilapidated and were not manned, apart from the guard stationed in the so-called star-bastion because that was where the toll-defrauders customarily sought to make their way into the town. Look over there, where the bosage with the three poplars in the middle is now, that’s where the star-fort was, and that’s where Rolof was standing on guard at that time.

“Towards evening the wind veered more and more to the east, the air stayed just as pleasant as it had been during the day, but the sky clouded over, and when I went home towards nine o’clock, there was a darkness you could grasp. I slept little, as Rolof, God knows why, was constantly in my mind. Towards four o’clock I heard an alarm-shot. I sprang straight out of bed into my clothes, and down the steps, towards the guard-

house. "What's wrong?" I asked. "Go to the Star-Bastion," the Corporal told me. I ran. There I found the Officer of the Day, going the rounds, cursing and storming before the sentry-box in which Rolof's musket and straps, uniform and hat were lying. "And Rolof, my sister's son?" I cried, rushing over and scattering the things as if he were hidden under them. "Well, what do you think it is?" the officer growled, "The dog has deserted! But we'll punish him! Pack off to your quarters, Drummer! You've no business being here!"

"Lord Jesus! Lord Jesus!" I hummed to myself, reeling away like a drunken man; sight and hearing failed me, and I didn't know what to make of it. Not until the next morning did I come to my senses, sitting on the steps before my room. Then I gritted my teeth and did what I had to do. I still remember everything, I think that I could tell, hour by hour, what I thought, what I did, where I went, stood, and sat; for such a time and such misery eat into your memory like caustic water, and it doesn't let you forget a single point. But I don't want to talk about that. What I felt at that time was and is so utterly atrocious, and you would perhaps laugh at the old fellow who makes so much out of – nothing. For what was it, in the end? Since I had been in the service, so many fellows had made off that you could have formed a new battalion from them. But what did I care about them? Nothing! And when we got them back, I beat my drum indifferently while they ran the gauntlet. But now it was Rolof – and the gauntlet for him! God in Heaven! I couldn't escape this thought, not for a minute while I was awake, not for a moment when I nodded off.

"On the evening of the eighth day after his desertion, I was sitting,

as usual in those days, at my post at the Sea-Gate and waiting – this time, not in vain. Towards dusk, an open farmer’s cart loaded with straw came driving up; Rolof lay in it, in chains again, covered with dirt and blood, his arm and head bandaged. A corporal and three fusiliers, their guns between their knees, cocked, were sitting at the front and at the back. As the Gate-Guard told them how things were between the two of us, they let me approach while the cart stopped for a moment. When I saw the unhappy man before me in such a state, I thought I’d have to cry; the tears were there, but they would not come out, and our Lord knows that the tears which flow from our eyes are not the ones that sting the most.

“Rolof –” I said, and I could not go on any further. He opened his eyes, looked at me, moved his head slightly and said, “Here again, Uncle.” And that was all. Not a muscle moved in his iron-hard face, and I noticed for the first time that he looked like his father – that is to say, as leaves in spring, which are still fresh and green, resemble the old ones, which autumn has made dry and grey. – Meanwhile, the cart drove on to the guardhouse. I walked, stupefied, behind it, gave his hand a squeeze when he was lifted down and taken in, and then I wasn’t allowed to see him any more. For he was no mere deserter, he was also a criminal, and I’ll tell you now how that came about, and as I heard it that evening from the corporal in his escort and afterwards from the man himself.

“Some time before this calamity, they had done what they should have done long before and placed a company of fusiliers in our hometown, as the excisemen could no longer stop the smuggling and could hardly find people who were willing to go there to certain death. Then all had been

quiet for a while, be it because of the military, be it because of the ice. But at last, they found the Chief Auditor on the gallows; on the next day Jan returned, and in the evening a ship appeared, the thaw beginning earlier there. It pushed its way into the ice as far as possible and gave its signal. The smugglers could not go out by boat, but they took sledges and came back towards two o'clock in the morning with full loads, under the leadership of Jan, who had not been quite exercising his old caution ever since Rolof was captured. They were discovered, attacked, and eventually defeated after a hard fight, which filled the narrow streets with dead and wounded. Among the latter was Jan, whom they brought, nearly cold, into my sister's house, where he died within the hour. And so he got his due. He richly deserved that end, and were it only for his son, whom he had entirely on his conscience.

“The women did not know what to do. They sent a messenger to announce the disaster to us and fetch us for advice and help. The lad they sent was Rolof's comrade and thought it would be better if he could bring the youth back alone, and later bring him away for keeps. When he arrived here in the late evening and asked a soldier for Rolof van der Kerken, he was told, as ill-luck would have it, “You won't speak to him today, he's standing sentry in the star-bastion.” “Hey!” the lad thinks, “that's a stroke of luck,” and he goes there and only has to say a word, then Rolof is spitting fire, and they're up and away.

“Now when he flew into the house towards night, he found his old man's coffin placed on chairs in the middle of the room, and the women pale and howling around it. But there was little time for asking and talking;

for no sooner had he told his shrieking mother and his sweetheart of his desertion and that he must move on at once, than they heard thumps on the door, which the lad had fortunately locked. The courier who had been sent after him from here had arrived that morning. The house was watched, twenty eyes had seen him stealing in despite the darkness. "They're here!" his mother screamed. "To the ice! To the ice!" Marie cried, dragging him up to the back window. But guards were standing there. They rush to the side, where the small courtyard between this house and the neighbouring one is enclosed by a high wooden wall; the soldiers are climbing over it. They hurry into the hidden room where Jan put the smuggled goods; then the door breaks from the blows and a whole troop pours in, the Captain of the company at its head.

"I won't flee!" Rolof shouted at the leader, and pushing back the shrieking women, he tore Jan's double-barrelled shotgun from the wall. "Go back, or you're dead men!" "Put the gun down," the Captain cried, leaping forward, "I am your superior, you dog, and I order you to surrender!" "No!" the youth cries at him, and fires; one bullet strikes the officer in his heart, the other lays a soldier low. They recoil, they leave him time to throw the gun down and tear the heavy cutlass and a pistol off the nails. Firing and thrusting, he rushes at them, in among them, drives them back, forces his way through the door into the street, rages on like the very Devil, pays no heed to the stabs, the strokes and blows which hail down on him from all sides, or the blood, his own and others', which spurts steaming around him. He, just one young fellow, fights against ten, twenty, thirty, against the whole company, for all I know! He nearly drives them to

flight, for they all press around, they defend themselves, they wound themselves, and their hair stands on end, he is raging, he is mad, yes! But he's a hero, a hero! He alone, he alone, the longer, the mightier, ever further through the mass, over corpses, through the blood – Jesus, my God!” cries the drummer, and he leaps up, and he throws his clenched fists at the heavens from narrating the crazed fight, as if he himself were crazed – “Jesus, my God! He fights like that, the one man, he alone, Rolof, alone, he, my darling! And everyone strikes at him, and not a devil stands by him! And I, old, torpid, stupid dog that I am, sit ten miles away, imagining all of this, all of it! And don't fly over to conquer, to die with him!”

The old man suddenly broke off, as if he had now come to his senses again. He slowly sat down, then rested his head on the table with a hard, jerky movement, and kept silent for a long while, without his deeply moved listeners daring to disturb him. When he then, some time later, raised his face again, it was the old, weather-beaten features, without significant traces of immoderate excitement.

“Yes,” he said, “you look at me dumbfounded and in disbelief, but I tell you, the people where I come from are of a singular stamp; when they once get going, really get going, then they're barely human any more, they are the very Devil and do things the mere thought of which makes another's flesh creep. The Corporal who reported this to me said he had been in several battles and in many a scrap where you could hardly open your eyes for the stabs and blows, but he had never experienced such fury. The men had fallen in a jumbled heap like stalks before the scythe, and nobody knew which way to turn. At last, after the fight had been going

on several minutes, an exciseman threw his carbine between his legs, making him slip on the bloody ground and fall. Then they had him.

“Now when I had heard this, I knew at once which way the wind was whistling, and I was no longer surprised at their forbidding me admission to him. His desertion, his mad fight – all that was nothing; but his bidding defiance to the officer who had announced himself and his shooting him dead – there would be the devil to pay for that!

“On the following morning, I went to the guardhouse again; I wanted to be near him, you see. The Captain had excused me from service. On that day, the Court Martial had its first sitting in the Garrison Headquarters. When they took Rolof to be examined, we squeezed hands again. He looked composed, but stiff and grim, and only when he looked at me did his features brighten for a moment. “Still here, Uncle?” he asked me. I only nodded, for I couldn’t have spoken for the world. Now while I stayed behind to wait for his return, listening to all the chatter around me and, although I had to force myself, joining in, I was suddenly called out, because two females, an old one and a young one, had asked for me. It was his mother and Marie. They had first laid the old man to rest, and then they had started out to see the young one here. I met them in my quarters.

“Is he dead, Uncle?” Marie asked, gripping my arm as if she would crush it like a reed. My sister did not speak, but she looked at me with a look – with a look! Lord, my Saviour, only a pair of mother’s eyes can give such a look when the life of her dearest, her everything, is at stake! “Children,” I said at last, “Children, he’s still alive, he isn’t dead yet. You’ll see him again soon, you’ll talk with him. There may still be hope!”

“This last remark was a lie, for I knew only too well what must come. But Marie let go of me, gave me a cold and fixed stare and said: “Uncle, it’s not true, what you’ve said to us, he has no hope and he must die, for he deserted and shot the officer dead. And so that you may know, I’m to blame for it, I alone; my letter tempted him, my messenger led him astray. O Rolof, my heart’s flower, why must you wither so young!” And she fell into our arms as if dead. My sister listened to all this in silence; she occupied herself with the poor girl and tried to bring her back to life, which she soon succeeded in doing. But she said nothing, but for: “Brother! Brother!” or, “Conrad!” and every time she gave me that sad, dry, burning look.

“Yes, that was misery such as should not be the portion of any man, for a human head cannot grasp it and cannot bear it, it must be the ruin of him.

“The women insisted on seeing him and talking with him, and to achieve their purpose, they didn’t shy away even from going to his superiors. So in the afternoon, when they had recovered somewhat and seemed to have calmed down, I had to go to the Colonel with them. We were admitted at once and found the General in the room also. Now their misery started up again; the old one spoke almost exclusively with her eyes, whereas Marie spoke with the most passionate force. I can’t say anything more about it. The General had tears in his eyes, the Colonel also. “I cannot, I may not!” said the General, and he clenched his teeth and crushed his hat between his hands. “Children, don’t break my heart! Even if it were my son, my own child, it might not, it could not be!”

“I stood there in a dull silence. I had known and said all this beforehand; there was neither help nor comfort. Finally, they withdrew, but I remained and begged for the first and last time in my life. I wished that we could be informed of the sentence as soon as possible and before the official announcement, so we might go to him at once and see him for a few hours longer. The General promised me this at once; I was to come to headquarters every day and stay there until the sessions had ended, to always be at hand. Once he had his sentence, we could go to him immediately; however, it might take several more days. People wished him well, for there was much to be said to excuse him; there were witnesses still to be examined, and suchlike. I gave a thousand thanks. “Do you love the lad so very much?” the Colonel asked me. “I should say so, Sir!” I said and burst into tears. “Sir knows that he is the very last of all my relatives, for my sister, you have seen, is old and grey and will shortly give up the ghost. That is as certain as Amen in the church.” “Then go, Drummer,” said the General, “we shall do for you what can be done.” While I walked through the antechamber, I heard the Colonel say: “It’s a crying shame, Excellency. The lad is a splendid fellow! If he had done that before the enemy, he would have been rewarded, but here, when he was fighting for his freedom –”

“I had to close the door and heard no more. So we waited, saw Rolof on his way there and his way back in the morning and afternoon, and stayed home the rest of the time. My sister sat in the corner, her shawl wrapped over her head, without sleep, tears, or words, pale and flinty. Marie, on the other hand, was feverish, wild, and passionate; her face

flushed, her eyes burning, her limbs perpetually shaking, she walked restlessly around, from the door to the window, from the window to the door, wringing her hands. I had never seen anything like it; it was as if her arms and hands had no bones and were nothing but joints, for her to be able to turn them in such ways. As for me, I did my duties again, for I would have gone mad then if I had had to be with the two of them all the time.

“The court lasted three more days. It was on the tenth of February, towards ten o’clock in the morning, when the presiding officer himself called me into the antechamber and told me the sentence, and that I could go to him with the women directly. – When the sentence was spoken, they had given him the choice between running the gauntlet for life or death, or the bullet. He had chosen death. “Because,” he said, “the other one would kill me too, if not at the time, yet afterwards; so this way is easier.” They had then held out the prospect of a pardon to him, but he refused to make any petition. “If you have given me my due,” he said, “then it’s my due, and that must be the end of it.” And that was the end of it; he was to be shot the next morning.

“I took my females into the prison, then I went to roll-call. After the Court’s sentence had been read out, and our company commanded to serve it, our Captain called me to one side and told me I was of course excused and could do whatever and go wherever I wished for these days. I protested that I did not want to be excused. He tried to persuade me to be sensible; it was the Colonel’s order and he wanted what was best for me. No, I said, I could not do that, and I wished to speak with the Colonel himself. That was allowed me and I was ordered to go to him in the

evening. Then I went to the detainee, where I found the women and the preacher with him.

“He was dressed neatly in clean clothes, and without chains. Grave, and yet serene, he came up to me, threw his arms round my neck, and said: “Uncle, do you forgive me all the misery I’ve caused you? But it couldn’t be otherwise; I foretold it to you that time.” Then I pushed him from me, laid my hands on his shoulders, and held him, so I could have a long look at him. “Rolof,” I said then, “why did you desert when you had sworn to the King, and also to me, on the morning of that day?” “Uncle,” he replied, “when I stood there, so alone, and the wind came from the east, I thought I heard the sea, luring me: come! come! Then I heard a bird’s cry – I still remember that it was a seagull. Then the messenger came bringing me news from home. And I couldn’t control myself anymore, I forgot my post and forgot my oath; I cast from me all that was not mine and dashed away, without thinking, without resting, until I was at home.”

“Then we made our full and final peace. “You’ll come along, Uncle?” he asked. “Yes, of course!” I answered. In the afternoon, the General and the Colonel and other officers came to take their leave of him. Then we stayed alone with him until evening, when it was time for me to go to the Colonel.

“I remember as if it were yesterday how I came out of the guardhouse, turned the corner and saw the long street lying before me so lonely and gloomy. Then the misery of it all overwhelmed me, I felt dizzy, and I had to rest my head against the wall. To hear this, to see this! Such a young, fresh, exuberant life, such vigour, such flesh and blood, such spirit!

And besides that, the poor creatures whose life and love all came from him, was all in him! And yet they knew that all would come to an end on the morrow! Tomorrow he was going to be called away, and he would have to go on his own two feet whither only the cart takes us or the bier bears us! It was too much for a man's equanimity, and I stood there as though paralysed, as though dead, and could think of nothing more than what I myself had previously said to him and what I still say: "Rolof, my boy, my heart and my love, why have you done this to me!"

"How I left there and came to the Colonel, I don't know. I only know that I was standing before him and he asked me, "What do you have for me, my poor son? Does he ask for a pardon? We'll dispatch the courier right away, and all will be in order by the day after tomorrow; the gauntlet will easily be arranged." "Pardon?" I replied. "No, Colonel, he must suffer what he deserves, that's just the way it is. He has his due, and that must remain to him; even His Most Gracious Majesty cannot change anything there. I'm not asking for that."

"You're both stubborn mules," he said, "so what do you want? Yet your captain has told me about your foolish wish. Stay back, my son, you can't endure it; I only want what is best for you." "Colonel," I said, "begging your pardon, but I must be there, even should it be the death of me." "Then I order you, as your Commander," he gravely replied, "that you stay back." "Colonel," I gave by way of reply, "I am sad, God knows! and I wish I were dead and all were over with me, but I'm healthy and in my right senses: I *will* not be excused and would rather be disobedient. It is a service of honour, Colonel. When one's brother dies or one's child, one accompanies

his dead body. And he's as good as my child, Sir, I have no other, none of my own. But that doesn't matter at all, he is my own, and so I would respectfully beg the Colonel not to cause me so much distress by not allowing me to accompany him on the last road he will walk. The Colonel has always been a gracious commander to me."

"He walked up to me, laid his hands on my shoulders and said: "Then go, you tough old fellow." And he turned away and went into the adjoining room. I made my way to the prison, stayed there until ten and then took the almost senseless women back to the quarters with me. There we sat without sleep through the night; I had to muffle my drum.

"At seven o'clock on the next morning, we marched out to Spruce Hill. In those days, however, there were only a few trees on it with some dense bushes, and at the front there was a crooked stump, which you can still see there; the other trees had not yet been sown. There, the chaps who had been ordered to do this service went up to Rolof and took their leave of him; then he threw his arms around my neck and we said our adieus. After that, he knelt down by the grave on the hill; he would not let himself be blindfolded.

"The officer gave the commands: "Aim! Fi—" When he had half-spoken the word it was as if the bushes close behind Rolof burst open like a door, and Marie sprang out of them towards the young man. "I'm coming with you!" she cried. "Stop! Ground arms!" the officer shouted, and he leapt forward like a madman and struck at the rifles with his sword. But it was too late! When she embraced him, she already had their bullets in her breast, just as he did. How all this had been possible, how she had come

there before us, how she could have concealed herself like that – I don't know. But it happened; and they both lay stone-dead.

“Then there were cries all around as if the world were coming to an end. The soldiers wept and howled like women, my Captain tore hair from his head and raved. But I know nothing more from that point on; I felt quite out of my senses. When I came round later, it was winter again. I set out and came back to my regiment two days before Eylau.¹⁵

“That's it!” said the drummer, putting his hands to his temples. “And now, children, go your ways, for my head's in chaos again. Didn't I tell you,” he concluded in an almost incomprehensible voice, with wild, staring eyes, “didn't I tell you, it's no story for daytime, for it's diabolical.”

IV. The Revolt

Since the drummer told his last tale, a terrible time has come over the land. As a result of several years of in part meagre, in part failed harvests, want, even hunger, has moved into the rich towns and villages. While daily wages did not rise and barely sufficed for people to miserably eke out a bare existence, while work came to a stop and the trades went to the dogs, while hordes of breadless and jobless people passed through the land, while hunger dragged disease in its wake and let it rage like the plague, the wretched ones saw usury stirring itself, the storehouses filling up and emptying, ship after ship carrying the corn which had been grown with the sweat of their brows, and which was now indispensable, out to

¹⁵ The Battle of Eylau was fought on February 7th and 8th, 1807.

foreign lands. The profound theories which encourage *such* freedom of trade were, alas, not understood by the people. The Christian charity which had England guzzling and guttling for its money and us starving for ours, unfortunately made little sense to them. They did not tarry any longer and rose up against this supposed injustice. They no longer kept to looting some bakers' shops, to forcefully detaining a ship, as had been the case up to then. The upright, but now desperate core of the people, had gradually been joined by sinister elements: a wild, rough rabble pressed further and further to the fore, demanded the looting of the well-to-do, the destruction of the factories and machines, the fall of the authorities, of the law. The civil means, so to speak, were exhausted; one had to enlist the help of the military.

And this also happened in the good old town into which the readers have followed us several times. The agitation had grown every day, there were ominous signs of a terrible outburst. Rumours crossed with rumours and assumed enormous dimensions; people named the streets where the rebellion would begin, the houses, the men, against which and whom it would be directed; people heard that the dyke-workers and river-workers would march to the town armed and in large crowds. Then many a man lost his head who should have kept it, and his fear, his uncertainty, heightened in turn those felt by others.

In the meantime, the necessary steps had been taken: the important buildings were provided with garrisons, the various guardhouses strongly manned; the remainder of the battalion had been confined to barracks. In the guardhouse of the main guard, things were lively enough this evening:

the benches were all full, as were the wide plank beds; muskets leaned against the wall in long rows on both sides of the door; every moment there came and went patrols, reports, and commands, which were brought to the Captain in the adjoining Officers' Room. And yet nowhere was it truly loud and lively, neither joke nor laughter stirred the air, nor loud conversation, as is usually quite natural and conventional among a bunch of light-minded and light-hearted young fellows. For the most part, they stared in silence, with a deep and painful understanding of the seriousness of the moment, at the sergeant and several corporals, who were busy at the table, opening the pockets of cartridges and distributing the number ordered to the men. We are overcome with a peculiar, melancholy, and unspeakably oppressive feeling when we take these small, death-threatening cylinders in our hand and have to live with the fear that we shall, perhaps even the very next moment, have to send them out, with ruinous effect, at our fellow citizens.

The old drummer sat in his usual corner at the stove, in which a roaring fire was burning; for the southeasterly wind whistled and howled furiously and threw the rain, hard and icy, against the high, airy windows. Ralow had watched the activity of the corporals just as silently as the others. Now when they had finished and were turning away from the table, he said: "It's a deplorable business, Sergeant; and you look depressed. Between you and me, and with all due respect for discipline, it seems to me that our commanders could have spared themselves and us this." "Well, it does look bad enough," replied the addressee. "It does not, God knows, have the appearance of peace." "Nonsense!" rejoined the

drummer. "What more do you have than rumours? They are often grubbed up by rascally knaves just for a joke. There'll be nothing today, take my word for it. Haven't you noticed how the reports have become better and better since the rain began? Nobody likes getting soaked to the skin; this is simply no weather for a revolt. I know something about this."

"You know that?" asked the Volunteer. "Have you got to know such disturbances in your homeland, father?" "What doesn't one experience!" answered Ralow. "A fair amount can happen in fifty years of service." "Then tell us about it!" cried the other. "You haven't given us a story for a long time, and something worth the telling must have happened in such disturbances." Others added their voices to this request, and as reports and patrols, orderlies and other interruptions were now coming more rarely, the drummer yielded and most of those present arranged themselves into a circle of listeners. The recruit, whose name we shall omit, even though he had served for ten months now and was already regarded as one of the veterans, the recruit sat at the front of the plank-bed with one leg dangling down, the other drawn up and propped against the edge of his seat, his arm resting on his knee, his chin in his hand, and so he presented a curious picture of attentiveness and nonchalance.

The old man looked at him gravely. "Fine then," he said, "you may hear about murder and manslaughter again. But you there, what's your name? Johann –"

"Nah, nah, I'm called Jochem," cried the recruit.

"Well, it's almost the same thing," the drummer coolly observed, "so listen, Johann or Jochem, such a position is disagreeable to your skeleton

and to me also. Sit up properly so you don't fall and make needless noise." The recruit, deeply embarrassed, hastily changed his position; the others laughed, but the old man gave him a contented nod and leant back at his ease.

"In those days," the drummer began, "we were still stationed in -g, the Grenadier Battalion of O. and the artillery were still there as well, but instead of the B. Dragoons, the H. Cuirassiers had been stationed with us, the same regiment which contained, you may remember, the son of that Colonel of D. whom Patow shot dead in days of yore. He had become Captain of Horse in the meantime, a serious and cold man.

"I can't remember what year it was, but it was at the very beginning of the century and a terrible time. The harvest was bad, dearth was great, and on top of everything they concluded a new peace up on the Rhine which nobody could be satisfied with and which increased or decreased the lands of every ruler. So people blathered on about politics, they sat jam-packed in the wine-houses and beer-houses in spite of the high-priced times, where heads become hot and words became loud, where they cursed first the French, then the disputes up in the Empire, and in two ticks they were onto their own affairs at home, railing at the misery of the time, at state and church, at their neighbours and friends, and above all else at the military, that's to say, at the officers.

"And the Lord can forgive them for that, because they had every right to rail, to curse, and to hate. The officers were a wild bunch everywhere, but nowhere moreso than with us. That was something else! They laughed and drank, they gambled and loved, they hounded and

hunted, they rode their horses to death, beat their dogs and their orderlies, they lived as if there were no tomorrow, didn't care for God or the Devil, had respect for nobody, and least of all for the old General in command of us. For his nobility originated only with his father or grandfather, while our officers were all as noble as canons. There were so many barons and counts that the citizens tended to give every officer they didn't know the title of 'Count' so as not to bring any inconvenience upon themselves with too low a title. The town belonged to the officers night and day, the rabble of townsfolk were there only for their amusement, the males to be teased, the wenches to be loved. The garrison's reputation spread, and officers got themselves transferred to us, especially as there were always vacancies. Few of our number grew old. Most of them fell in duels, or crashed down on their hunts and races, or broke their necks when the ladder at the window of a lovely lady did not hold fast, or they were promoted and then transferred. They were as wild as the natives of Hell, but for all that, they were smart, strong fellows, and their like is not to be found any more. In short, things were wild and extraordinary, and as far as love-intrigues were concerned, words can't begin to describe them. No window was too high, no door too thick, no bolt too fast. They wanted in and they came in, now using kindness, now using cunning or force. And wherever it was difficult to attain their goal, that was precisely where the gentlemen most eagerly showed up. And the Devil knows that, as deeply as they were hated by the men, so deeply were they loved by the women.

It had always been an unholy state of affairs, but never yet as wild as in that year. No week passed without there being some new story full of

strife and love, full of vexation and laughter; the long faces of the poor citizens were a melancholic sight everywhere, and our young gentlemen had never had so much, and such merry tales to tell each other on parade. And yet everything went well until finally, towards Epiphany, that furious affair began which landed us all in the soup together later.

“In the Cuirassiers there was at that time a Herr von Wildenstein, a very young man, a slender, puny figure, a face like milk and blood, with features almost as soft and delicate as those of a maiden. I fancy I can still see him before me, as he walked up Cross Alley in the morning on his way to parade with the long blond hair which he let grow against the rules and powdered only a little, with a large hat upon it, with mighty boots on small feet, the massive sabre under his arm. Dear God, I thought, where does the uniform want to take the poor man? And then when I heard him speak, so gentle, so soft and friendly – and when the Colonel spoke to him, he turned red all over – “Oh, Jesus mine,” I said to our Sergeant, who was standing there, “that is indeed a charming gentleman, but he’s not a cuirassier, and I’d like to know how he’s going to struggle his way through here.” “Well, well, drummer,” he replied, smoothing down his side-curls, “let it be, he comes from good stock. I knew his father, he too was such a refined little gentleman, but the strongest fellow far and wide at the same time.”

“Well then, it was pretty much like that. The gentleman paid all due honour to his name, for he was one of the wildest, if not the most madcap of all, and at that time, wherever a truly choice prank, an absolute piece of devilry took place which got the whole town going and the garrison as well,

Herr von Wildenstein was invariably at the head of it. Apparently, when the Commander received the report in the morning and heard in between of this or that boisterous deed, he would ask very coolly: "Is he in the clink?" "Your Excellency?" the reporting officer then asked in some consternation. "Well, I'm asking if he's in the clink?" the old man shouted brusquely, "he, who else? The mischief-maker, the curly-head, the philanderer – what is the devil called? Wa- We- Wi- Wildenstein, deuce it!" "But, Excellency," the officer replied, "he was not there at all." "Nonsense, stuff and nonsense! Don't try to kid me!" cried the General. "Where else could he have been? But you are all in cahoots. I'll sort you out, he shall go into the clink!"

And that was what happened. He went in at midday and came out in the evening. It became a kind of leitmotif, and if you kept a look out at the Coalmarket, where he lived, in the morning, you'd see as a rule the General's adjutant enter his quarters around eleven or twelve o'clock to breakfast with him; after that, he was confined to his quarters all afternoon or he went to the watch-house. He didn't mind, I think, either way, as he had it good everywhere. Among his comrades, he was definitely the flavour of the month; his platoon, and I think the entire regiment, would have laid down their lives for him, and with the women, one and all, he was cock of the walk. In short, the town was full of Herr von Wa- We- Wildenstein; they had composed a splendid song about this and it made the old Commandant himself laugh."

"Sing it to us, Ralow," said the Volunteer. The old man laughed and shook his head. "Singing is forbidden," he replied, "and besides, I forgot it long since. I've better things to take into my head than such inanities. So, I

said, he was cock of the walk with women, and that proved his undoing. For it has to be true that womenfolk were created to punish the likes of us, and to bring us to sheer and utter perdition.

I lived at that time in Cross Alley, opposite a coppersmith, an honest, thrifty young man, who had returned from his journeyman's wanderings not long before, married, and opened his workshop in his parents' house. His young wife and his still unmarried sister were a couple of women as neat and trim as I'd ever seen, and Herr von Wildenstein and another man, a cornet in the Cuirassiers, had found this out also, and they shared the love-intrigue in brotherly fashion and cast languishing looks, the lieutenant with the wife, the cornet with the sister. And that was why they always walked through Cross Alley when they could have taken a nearer way to parade and the assembly place. How the two females received this flattery, I don't know for sure, but they wouldn't, I think, have been exactly too incensed at it; for the military was in vogue, and these gallants were spruce fellows and hotheads to boot.

"Now, this window-parade may at length have grown tedious to the gentleman, and being an alert companion, he went to the beauty's house towards evening one day, as on a neighbourly visit, dressed in a comfortable coat and with his foraging cap on his head, found her alone with the sister-in-law, and told them and chatted to them about this and that and God knows what. It must have been merry; for when the husband came home, he heard laughter and music and song ringing out towards him. Astonished and curious what this could mean in his quiet house, he flung open the door, and the sight of the goings-on almost paralysed him.

The lieutenant, whom he could not stand on account of his frequent walking past, nods, and greetings, was sitting on the sofa, playing the guitar and singing along, laughing and behaving as if he were at home; the wife was sitting by him, the sister was not far away either, and they were all laughing and making a racket in the best of moods.

“When the wife suddenly saw her husband standing so rigid and menacing at the door, she started up and hastily said, The gracious gentleman was doing them the honour of paying a friendly visit. “Too much honour from the gracious gentleman,” replied the master, and walking up closer, he sharply asked what the Lieutenant actually wanted? “Well, by God,” he said, “I’m paying a neighbourly visit, and I also wanted to make your acquaintance, my dear host.” “Host?” replied the master of the house, “this is no inn, Lieutenant, and I don’t take in guests.” “Now, now,” replied the latter, still smiling, “don’t get worked up, my dear host. Hopefully I shall become your guest after all; for as my old quarters no longer please me, and you have a couple of neat rooms upstairs which I like, I am sure we shall come to an agreement. The lovely lady here,” he added, and he grasped her hand and nodded to her, “she has already agreed to it.” Then the husband roughly seized his wife by the arm and took her, with her sister, into the next room. After that, he came back and said, He was master here, it was not his wife’s place to command, but to ask and obey, and he – that is, the Lieutenant – was not going to be given the rooms.

“You’re looking at me –” the drummer interrupted himself here – “and wanting to ask me where I know all this from? Well now, the coppersmith’s journeyman came from my hometown, and every now and

then we'd sit together after work chatting about this and that. And so on that evening we were in the workshop, which lay directly opposite the living-room, and as the master had forgotten to close the door when he walked in, we not only heard every word but could also see most of what was happening quite at our leisure.

"In the meantime, Herr von Wildenstein had remained perfectly calm, even seeming to take delight in the master's anger. "My dear friend," he said, "you are a fool to turn down the good rent, for I'm not stingy, I can tell you, and a handful of dollars make no odds to me." "Lieutenant," the man replied, "I am not your friend, and I at least do not rent out my honour." "Honour?" said the officer with a laugh, "I don't need to rent that from you, I only want the quarters." "Very well," replied the master, walking right up to him, "let us not get worked up. So go now, for my house is not used to such a visit and I don't like it and won't have it." "That is bad!" the gentleman burst out with a laugh, sinking back into the sofa. "I wager that I'll stay here yet. So how are we going to come to terms?"

"The master was one of those who curse and rage at first, but the deeper they get into an argument, the quieter and colder they become, I wouldn't however say the more peaceable and tractable. And so he now said, quite coolly, "Well, Lieutenant, then I'll have to make use of my right to show you the door." "And if I wish to make use of my right to sit?" Wildenstein asked with no shortage of mockery. "Then I know what to do," replied the coppersmith. "I'll seize the bony little gentleman and gently set him in the street, there is room to sit there. Like so, for example." And he seized him, but he did not lift him up; instead, he reeled sharply back,

although he was a strong man and the gentleman just like a doll. The journeyman seeing this, wanted to help his master; but I grabbed him by the collar, held him fast and spoke amicable words to him. He did not break free; but because of this simple affair we fell out and never associated with each other afterwards. He was not one to be teased, my countryman.

“Meanwhile, the men in the room were still quarrelling and disputing, that is to say, without any further fisticuffs, until at length Herr von Wildenbruch rose and remarked in closing: he was going now because it pleased him to, and he would return when it was his pleasure to do so. With that, he went, and all this time he had not become any wilder, and his voice had remained as soft and mild as usual; whether he laughed, joked, cursed or mocked, it was all just the same to him.

“Who passed this business on, I don’t know; but word went round, and the Lieutenant was teased tremendously by his comrades, he had here been properly baulked for once and had been obliged to quit the field before Master so-and-so, the poor bourgeois beggar. The gentleman was presumably irked, but being a clever, ingenious fellow, he did not speak either of his vexation or his plan, but restrained himself, frequently passed through Cross Alley, greeted the coppersmith’s wife and her husband, both of whom turned red every time; and for the rest, he raged now here, now there, as merrily as ever, and patiently bided his time.

“Now it was, as I said before, a few days after Epiphany. The coppersmith had gone to a nearby town on business and did not return until late evening, around ten or eleven o’clock. At the entrance to Cross

Alley, he got off the sleigh which he had borrowed from a friend, had the servant ride away, and headed for home with his things. The door was bolted, as is fitting in the absence of the master of the house, but it remained so, and though he knocked repeatedly, quietly at first, then more and more loudly, and called and cursed and swore, not a sound stirred in the house and no light was to be seen. At last he thought he heard voices, but it was only the neighbours whom all this noise had made restless. He stormed and raged ever louder: all remained still, and half an hour may have passed in this way. It was a bitterly cold night, the snow crunched underfoot, and the moon and the stars made it almost as light as day all around.

“Then up on the second floor, the window of his bedroom opened a little and a voice, nearly as deep and angry as that of the master himself, asked from it: “Well, have you finally made your fill of noise, you drunken night-reveller? Is it time now to go home from the inn? You can clear off, I don’t need such companions.” “Hey,” shouted the master, “this is no companion, this is me myself! And who is the rogue who keeps me locked out of my house?” “Hark at the fool!” was called back, “who may you be?” “I’m the master, you scoundrel! Come out!” the furious man yelled up. “Is the fellow mad?” the one up there laughed. “You would be the master? Wife, pray tell me, am I not your husband?” And from the depths of the room, another voice answered: “Come on, husband, close the window, it’s getting cold here, come! What do you think this is? The mad Lieutenant is vexing you.”

The husband shook the door so hard I thought it would fly into

pieces like cardboard, and he began to yell like a madman: “Ha, scoundrel, so it’s you? Just wait, I’ll punish you for this prank!” And he began to cry: “Thieves! Thieves!” until almost the entire street had gathered around him. Then the window opened again and a voice cried menacingly: “Apprehend the lunatic, neighbours; you see he takes himself to be me, and yet I’m at home and want to sleep. Why do we have nightwatchmen, if a peaceable citizen can’t lie undisturbed in his bed anymore! But I know false pretences. My wife is right about the Lieutenant. Take him to the guardhouse!”

“All the while, the master was shouting and raging, some people cursed, others yelled, and yet others laughed, this man and that had a good look at the poor devil’s face to see if he was truly and definitely the right person. One man had fetched a locksmith to open the door, others ran over with colstaves to break it down; the nightwatchmen, on hearing that there might be officers involved, prudently made off; a patrol which came up also disappeared. The Devil would have it that it was the Cuirassiers on guard on that very day. In short, it was a hell of a rumpus. It was, God knows, an easy matter to get into the house with all those people around; but the master himself was out of his senses with rage; others kept their own counsel, the rest – well, many cooks spoil the broth.

“Finally, however, they resolved to take the matter seriously in hand, and they advanced towards the house, only to retreat cursing and sputtering when a bucket of water was poured over their heads from above. If the noise had not been great, it became so now, for everyone now clamoured about the abomination of locking such a peaceful citizen,

the child of good people, out of his home, away from his family, out of his property, and those who had only laughed hitherto gradually became furious and poured forth curses and abuse; but they kept a proper distance from the house. Then the upstairs window opened a third time and, in the silence which suddenly ensued, the now familiar voice said: "If you all want to rave with the raving, then may the Devil take you. Sophie!" – that was the name of the maid in the house – "Sophie, go through the yard-gate at the back, run to the watch and ask the Lieutenant for help. But don't give him a kiss, he must do it for free. You hear?"

"To howls of laughter breaking out from all sides, he closed the window and the house was quiet and dark again. The master suddenly broke free from all the talkers, the chatterers and the advice-givers and said: "All right, run and man the yard-gate, and then onwards. Curse me for a dog if I don't strike him dead like a brute beast. Even if it's the death of me, I'll give them an example they won't forget for the rest of their days." And he picked up a colstave, ran at the house and thundered against the door, making its hinges creak. Meanwhile, a new patrol forced its way through the crowds. The corporal asked what the noise meant, what was wrong? "Nothing we could use you for," the master replied rudely, without interrupting his work, "just go back and say that we citizens have set about the problem ourselves and we'll soon restore order all right." The corporal was a sensible man, he saw that all Hell was let loose and the matter far beyond a joke, but he said he could not leave as he was commanded to be there. He would, however, not interfere unless to prevent trouble. "Fine," the master coldly replied, "then stay. When we've found what we're looking

for, we'll deal with you as well."

"And in the meantime the door broke, he stepped into the house, and the swarm poured in after him. I had come down from my garret by this time and I pressed my way into the house with the corporal to prevent any murder or manslaughter. But we could have saved ourselves the trouble, as there was not a soul to be found anywhere. They had gone; whether it had been an apparition, as some had thought, or whether the Devil had helped them get away, or whether they had escaped over neighbouring yards and gardens, has never been discovered. The women, who were also missing, were found at last shouting and railing in the cellar. They related that they had been attacked by several masked men in the late evening and locked in their prison, where they had heard the commotion in mortal fear and had shouted, as loudly as they could, to draw attention to themselves. But in my opinion, there wasn't much fear to be seen in them, with the exception of the wife. The master wasn't at all hoodwinked; he listened to the report in silence, then he grimly and imperiously pointed upstairs; he had not said a word since breaking into his house.

"As we all made our way out, we found several officers in the patrol outside who inquired after the cause of the commotion. At the front of them was Herr von Wildenstein, who split his sides laughing at the tale. "Yes, yes," he said, "if the little master had taken me into his house, this would not have happened to him; I would have protected his fortress." When the coppersmith caught sight of him and heard these words, he stared at him as if he were beholding the ghost of his mortal enemy, with such rancour,

such shock. But then he turned away, nodded to his neighbours and returned into the house. The officers laughed and left. But all this did not appear in the least amusing to me. Yes, if he had only spoken, raged, cursed – only a child runs from words – but being so silent as he was, I might say, so compressed – then even a straightforward fellow might fall into a musing mood.”

The drummer fell silent and refilled his pipe. Meanwhile, the clocks struck the eleventh hour, the reliefs came and went, and the patrols brought the news that all was calm and there was no longer any cause for fear. Half of the men were therefore dismissed to their quarters, and the officers made their way home. But the Volunteer, the Sergeant, and several others remained sitting around the old man and called upon him, now, when all was peaceful again, to carry on with his tale. He drank from the beer given to him and continued.

“This affair caused a terrible sensation, for things had never gone so far before, and on the other hand, nobody had, up to then, taken the matter in hand so seriously as the coppersmith now did. Usually, people had let themselves be calmed down and mollified, and the scandal had been hushed up; there was no question of this happening with him, and he pursued an investigation. Of course, next to nothing came from this. It was apparently established that both the people in the house had been military men, and cuirassiers at that, but what good was this? Wildenstein proved where he had been that evening; now the Devil might search all the rest of the regiment. So the master received very sincere condolences from his authorities and from the Commander’s office, and it was moreover

announced that no soldier would wear civilian clothes from then on and that nobody would be allowed to stay out of his dwelling after ten o'clock in the evening without special permission from his superior. Patrols were to walk throughout the night and put everyone under arrest who couldn't prove that he was entitled to go out. That was all. And that amounted to nothing as well, for which soldier is going to take risk of laying his hand on his officer? The officers snarled with hostility, cursed the coppersmith, sang a new verse about Herr von Wa- We- Wildenstein, but carried on exactly as before, only perhaps a little more secretly.

The master, in the meantime, cared little for the curses and threats and managed everything wonderfully quietly and cold-bloodedly. The maid he dismissed from his service, his sister he sent to relatives in the country, and his wife was no longer to be seen; it was said that she lay gravely ill as a result of fright and a chill. He took on three new journeymen, his business flourished as never before, and he had, to all appearances, forgotten the whole affair. But a good many people maintained that he was machinating on his revenge. The citizenry, all those who were craftsmen and shopkeepers, the lower-ranking officials, the townsmen who cultivated land, he had all of these together, it was said, on his side.

“Yes, men, the rumour goes that every now and then, a hostile evil spirit passes over the earth, tugging hearts hither and thither and turning heads. This, I think, must have happened there, or this unanimity of enmity and defiance would not have come to the surface all at once. Everything was damned different now. Where the people had used to bow, they now walked with stiff napes, where they had used to timidly step to the side,

they now looked darkly and straight into your eyes, where they had formerly been delirious with gratitude and devotion when an officer frequented their shop, placed an order, or bargained there, they now closed the door in his face and gave either nothing at all or, if something, only as if for the love of God; all of a sudden it was only “Lieutenant,” “Captain,” and nothing more. It was as if the Devil had fetched away all the barons and counts overnight. If the people had formerly blathered around politics all over, now they were in a permanent huddle, and there was no end of whispering nor of speaking out loud. Harsh, mocking, hard words fell, and if an officer said something in reply, things became even worse.

The Cabbage-Market is a triangle, not very big, and where it runs out against Capuchin Alley it may be not over thirty paces broad. Herr von Wildenstein lived in the corner at that time, and directly or rather diagonally opposite him lay the Black Cock Inn. The citizens were sitting together there one day, talking as usual. An officer in the so-called Gentlemen’s Room next door heard their talk, appeared in the doorway and scolded them; it was a Herr von T. of the Grenadiers. Then the fat baker from George Corner stood up and said: “If the gentleman doesn’t like what he hears here, why is he listening at the wall? There’s an old saying about that, and it’s true. We want our houses and our rooms for ourselves. We’re none of his army-coats and couldn’t give a damn about the officers. And now adyoo and good day! May the gentleman go and control himself in future!” The officer ran over, cursing, and brought his stick down on the shoulder of the speaker, who, however, grabbed him by his back and chest and threw him like a bundle of rags out the window into the street, with the

result that the gentleman's face and head were badly injured and he suffered from these wounds for half a year. And that was the beginning of the violence.

“That same evening a citizen was given a vicious drubbing by several soldiers, it was said at the instigation of their officers; on the next day some officers met the same fate. Investigations led to nothing. The citizens now sang their songs, and they were not refined ones; the officers heard them everywhere. In the evenings they could walk around only in companies, or had to be officially escorted. If we had had other commanders, things could not have gone so far; but the General was a genial, sickly old gentleman and timid beyond measure; and our colonels were not very different. They tried this and that, they threatened and they asked, but nothing had any success, or not until it was too late. It was a wild-to-do, and it became worse day by day.

“And so the disorder dragged on into mid-February. Then the old General was pensioned off and our Colonel also left. The new commander was a completely different man, vigorous and tough, but humane too. – Now it was said: Attention, soldiers! Anyone who grumbles, who does mischief or induces it, will find the General in me. And it went on: Pay attention, citizens! If you do not keep the peace now, you will come under this and that. One heard talk of state of siege, of martial law and the like. On the day after his arrival, that was the order of the day; that was the proclamation to the citizens which was posted on the street corners and read out from the pulpits, as was the fashion at that time. But it was already too late, for the citizens were no longer alone.

“I’ve already told you that the times were bad, provisions expensive, earnings low, hunger and dissatisfaction great. Naturally, this hit mainly the lowest classes, the little people, the degenerate workmen, the shellfish diggers, the river-workers, the mariners and day labourers, and all suchlike. Now when they noticed that the citizens were becoming enraged also, they pressed to the fore and were well received. And now one did not speak of the military only, now the internal conditions of the town were criticised more severely than ever, the authorities, the want, the hunger, the bad protective measures, and God knows what else. It was said: He’s bad, we must kill him! or: He’s a friend to the poor, we want him leading us! And among these last, the coppersmith was particularly mentioned; everyone greeted him, three cheers rang out after him here and there, and in the evening they roared vivat after vivat for him in front of his door.

“In short, I assure you, things were exactly like they are with us here and now. A humming and buzzing went through the town, like you hear in a beehive when spring days come and the entrance is still covered. Something was going to happen, that seemed certain. And many people may have been anxious, for it was true that the populace had been fleeced and oppressed in many ways. We, certainly, looked calm. We were about four thousand men, and when that’s the case, you think you’re a match for the Devil. We could not, admittedly, know that he too was at work, and that we really would come up against him.

“It was actually forbidden to shoot in the town, but hitherto nobody had cared about that; and our officers, on the contrary, gave themselves the pleasure of shooting out their windows at a house standing opposite,

and as the gentlemen were good marksmen and people generally did not like to complain about them, so complaints were rare and ensuing punishments even rarer. And so, on the morning of the day I'm going to speak of, it occurred to Wildenstein to once again lay siege to, as he called it, his vis-à-vis, the Black Cock. He therefore fired pistols, with a half-dozen of his breakfast guests, at a spot between the upper windows where two posts crossed and had often furnished the mark. There was actually no chance of an accident happening; for none of the area was very busy and now, because of the heavy snow, it was almost totally deserted. The few women who sat between the snowbanks with herbs and provisions fifty paces away made a bow at every shot, but that only amplified the gentlemen's delight and they didn't let it bother them. I can tell you all of this only as I heard it myself, but I must give you an account of it, as it necessarily belongs to my story.

“In the midst of their merriment, a window opposite, close to their target, opened and a man appeared at it. He took a very leisurely look at the merry bunch, then at the post by his side, and he did not wince when a bullet struck beside him that same moment. But immediately afterwards, the boots came running over and brought greetings from the host, and the stranger was a noble gentleman and was greatly astonished at the shooting in the town; he therefore respectfully begged that they would stop their exercises. “What, stop!” cried Herr von Wildenstein, “noble gentleman, my foot! He's a counter-jumper who gives himself airs. Just wait, I'll put the wind up him.” And he snatched a pistol from the hand of the groom, who had just reloaded, mockingly waved his hat at the stranger

opposite, cried, "Watch out!," gave fire and pulled the trigger. And with that, it was game, set and match to the Devil.

"God knows how it came about, whether he had held the gun too low, or his hand had been unsteady, enough to say the bullet tore down a man's hat as he was walking by and then pierced right through the inn shield, a span's breadth under the stranger. He coolly bent over, examined the hole with his finger and then withdrew. But on the square, a crowd of people swarmed together; it was said that the man whose hat had been hit was wounded. That was not true, not a hair of his head was hurt; but if they had shot him dead, it would not have been worse. For I tell you, men, it was the coppersmith, once again the coppersmith.

At this, even Wildenstein, who had leapt out of the window, turned pale and then red. He walked up to the master and told him how sorry he was for the incident etc. But the master asked him if he wished to kid him that it had been an accident? "Yes," he said, "an accident that it passed through my hat and not through my head, as it was meant to. I know fine well that you aristocratic knaves like to wreak your anger upon us townspeople. But by God's thunder, you gentlemen, have a care for yourselves when we turn the tables! And we will turn them!" This enraged another officer, who cried wrathfully: "Hey, Wildenstein, give the fellow a coin for his hat, for that's what he wants, and then we'll let the boulder go." And the gentleman reached into his pocket, fetched out a gold coin and said with a smile, "Here, take this, master, and go in peace." But the coppersmith only raised his hand, shook it menacingly, and promptly walked away. And at the same time the people standing around –

goodness knows how they had congregated so quickly – raised rapturous cries of vivat and set up a furious yell of revenge against the officers. These barely made it back inside the house, where they actually had to barricade themselves in, and if a patrol had not subsequently taken them to the guardhouse at the Commandant's order, blood might have flowed at that time. The gentlemen had to be taken out the back, over yards and through side-alleys, for the people stood crowded together at the front and neither yielded nor wavered. Things really didn't look good at all for the detainees, for the Commandant was absolutely livid at the incident. The stranger who had reported the matter to him was his Royal Highness Prince Louis Ferdinand, who was travelling through our town incognito. There were negotiations with the coppersmith so he might let the matter rest and be pacified. But nothing was to be got from him. He didn't want to lodge a complaint, he said, nothing would come of that.

“So they considered the coppersmith to be at peace; but in the town, all Hell was let loose and the agitation rose with every minute. The people passed through the streets in dense hordes, breaking a few windows here, smashing one of the few streetlamps there, taking bread or payment for themselves from some shops, howling, singing and yelling, cursing the military and the authorities. The streets were full, they swarmed in the squares like bees, drink flowed like rivers in the taverns without anyone knowing who was paying. Here and there, of course, a patrol would disperse a crowd, but it closed together again behind them; in another place, some of the maddest clamourers and troublemakers were seized and put into prison; and this made the others yell all the more

angrily. And so that afternoon a state of siege was proclaimed, the bridges raised, the gates locked, we soldiers assembled. Martial law reigned; but the best thing was that the heavens were on our side. The wind veered to the west and brought a thaw and heavy rain. Even the maddest ones stayed out in the streets no longer, and around ten o'clock the town was calm and quiet. There was only the rain pouring down against the old gables, and water trickling between the high banks of snow alongside the houses.

All the same, it was an anxious night; yet it passed peacefully. Towards morning, the rain stopped, there was a light frost, the streets became passable again, and yet remained quite empty. While there were more people going around than usual, they were for the most part on their own, and whenever they encountered one of the frequent patrols, they silently made way. The townsfolk sent deputations to the magistrate to beg the release of the prisoners, and to the Commandant to open the gates and let the countryfolk into the town for market. The magistrate referred them to the military authorities; the Commandant turned down their petitions and earnestly exhorted them to be peaceful. He knew very well, he said, that they had been wronged, that they had borne what was unbearable; he was sorry for that, and he wished to make things better, as far as he could. But he himself would not have what was right and proper wrung from him by force, even if the town went to ruin as a result. They claimed to be sensible people, so they should tell him what they had been thinking about with all these disturbances? And if the military really had been brought out of the fortress by force, did they think they would have

been gone forever, and they would remain unpunished forever? They had, in the meantime, allied themselves with the mob; did they know that it could become too much for them to handle? He and his soldiers were not afraid. In the worst case, he would move into the foot and quite leisurely fire away until the town was level with the ground. So they should be sensible and look to ensure good sense in others.

“Those were his words, and the effect was mighty. My landlord, who had gone with the deputation, said that no sermon had ever gone through him like this; it had all come out so clear and precise, a child could have understood it. They then went away utterly crushed, and the words about the mob, in particular, had got terribly into their heads. So they now ran around, speaking and entreating all they could, as in spite of the temporary calm, nobody believed in its continuance. But it was, once again, simply too late. That’s a cursed word, and I think the way it often sounds in our heads and in our hearts must be like the sound of the Lord’s judgement on the Day of Reckoning.

“It was a gloomy day, such a one on which we look sombre ourselves, and which we feel to be perfectly suited for any kind of disaster. The sky was covered with thick cloud, every now and again it snowed a little – in the countryside there, they call it “crumbling” – but it was mostly dry and the wind came down the streets in keen, raw gusts, shaking the trees on the old marketplace and whistling round the corners of the church. To avoid further agitation, we soldiers weren’t assembled, but we also weren’t allowed to leave our quarters and had to be ready all the time. Gates and guardhouses, prisons and the arsenal, the stables of the

Cuirassiers and of the artillery were strongly manned, there were guards at the churches, and two guns before the main guardhouse, and two gunners with burning fuses stood by them. Enough to say, all was prepared, for we didn't trust the peace, and we were right not to.

“In the afternoon, around the time of the last twilight, it broke out, the streets seemed to fill all at once; it was as if every cobblestone had changed into a howling beast. It wasn't crowds, but the surging of a single stream; and along with that, cursing and singing, shouting and raging, howling and roaring, a vivat here, windows smashed there. Where this came from, nobody knew. The streets had been empty just a moment before, and now the patrols had to cut a hurried retreat with their bayonets at the ready.

“You don't know -g; but I'm telling you, there's absolutely no more suitable or more damnable dump for a street fight, depending on your point of view. It's quite a big town, built in the old-fashioned way; the narrow streets struggle along, so to speak, crooked and full of angles between the tall, stone, gabled houses; jutties, oriel windows, necks of cellars,¹⁶ and high steps before the doors, make them even narrower; a dozen churches are surrounded by walled-in churchyards, which can serve as just as many entrenchments, and old monastic buildings can be used as citadels.

“That's how it was, and when it grew dark, two cannon-shots roared from the main guardhouse calling to assembly. And it was good they did,

¹⁶ In many towns in the north or east of Germany, the entrance to the cellar was from the street, so casks could be loaded or unloaded more easily. This entrance was built out into the street, often more than six feet high; it was always of stone, and had iron gates.

for although our drums beat the alarm and the trumpets rang out the call to mount, they could hardly be heard for the noise. But ten minutes later, our company was standing ready outside our Captain's quarters, and we set out. At the same time, however, regular gunshots cracked from the neighbourhood of the High Gate. The people were attacking the guard there to seize the gate; that was where the first blood flowed. Then there was rattling fire over from the prison, then a few palisade-sheds went up in blazing flames and shone over the town. After that the alarm-bells suddenly began to ring, first from one tower, then from two, three, finally from almost all of them, as the individual posts were easily overpowered. And on top of that, the roars and yells as if the whole of Hell were inside the walls; and on top of that, the darkness of the streets, for wherever lights had appeared in windows in accordance with orders, the people smashed in the panes. It was a satanic hubbub, and we had to go through the midst of it.

“In the beginning, things went tolerably well. Those who saw us marching up in a tightly-formed mass, loading and then striding resolutely forwards with our rifles in our arms, they timidly got out of the way, pressing themselves against the houses or bounding into the cross-streets. But the further we went, the worse it became, and at length there was no going any further at all, so densely were the masses wedged together. All around, a hundred cudgels were swung, a thousand voices stormed, roared and raged, so loud to surpass belief. Then the Captain leapt forward – I've told you about him already, he was a lion before the enemy – he brandished his sword and shouted with such a powerful voice that it

travelled through the din like a trumpet-blast: "Will you make way for us, you crazy people?" A brawny fellow rushed at him, grabbed hold, and dragged him to one side into the tumult. "Take him away!" they roared; this all happened in a flash. Well, we were fond of him and there was no time for tarrying. So I shouted, "Over here, Fifth Company!", threw my drum onto my back, pulled out my sabre, and followed after him, thrusting and stabbing. He was already lying on the ground, but I used my weapon, soon made space for him, and struck around me like a wounded boar, until he picked himself up, until to the right and to the left the scoundrels fell before our bayonets. No sooner was the Captain on his feet than he clapped me on the shoulder, tore the sabre from my hand, for his sword was broken off at the hilt, cried: "Charge bayonets! No shots, my boys! Iron, iron! Forwards, drummer! Double-quick time! Hurray!" And as the beasts had thronged together again, I gave one of them a kick, clouted another one's ear with my drumstick, and drummed a few beats; and in this way we passed through, at the will of God, down the street to the Old Market. There another company came towards us and took on the crowd in front of us, but they scattered like chaff, and we had no time to run after them.

"We had lost two or three men in our platoon, and many had received wounds and knocks, the Captain a stab in the shoulder from a knife. Most of the other units had fared similarly, they had been able to make their way through only after a great struggle. Not a soul had held such a serious rebellion, such violence on the part of the people to be possible. Otherwise, we would certainly have been assembled beforehand; but would we have done any more in that case? I don't know. But now we

moved forward again. We made the terrain visible for ourselves with torches and used our weapons without mercy; bayonet attacks and rolling fire, the Cuirassiers laying about them, the artillery rushing up and firing grapeshot, they all happened successively, alternately, and we made but scant progress. The people were like madmen. They would rather let themselves be skewered like quails than yield the way. When we had finished in one street, it all started up again in the next one. In the narrow alleys running towards the river there was a stationary battle. They had made barriers, they had pikes and guns, they worked with firehooks and boathooks and long knives and axes and hatchets; stones and furniture, logs and God knows what else flew at our heads from the houses. In Ferry Alley, which is particularly narrow, they threw a heavy net over us from two houses which stood opposite each other; then one group descended upon those who were falling to the ground and worked with their knives, so that we had about twenty men wounded before we got the better of them. It had reached the point where quarter was neither given nor taken.

“Yes, it was a bloody night. I’ve been in many a battle and in many a village-fight, and at Eylau I was one of the soldiers who stormed the churchyard, and at Donnewitz there was a red mist before me; but compared to this street-fight, they were all sheer children’s play, mere trifles, and even today, when I think of it, the sweat breaks out on my brow. May God not let us live the like again! Every soldier can pray that, and he truly doesn’t cede any of his courage by doing so.

“Now let me come to the end. So when we had freed ourselves from the net and cleaned the street, and were pressing through to the

Coalmarket, we came into a square which opened between two tall houses and which was called The Desolate House. There the torchlight showed us a heap of dead bodies; there were eight or nine of the revolters and four Cuirassiers. Among them, half mangled and barely still recognisable, stretched over his dead horse, lay Herr von Wildenstein. You ask how this might be possible, when he had been in detention? It was simply God's judgement, men. The originator of this disaster was not to get off scot-free. A cuirassier who had been there and had escaped with a dozen wounds told us the following about it.

“When the tumult had just begun, Wildenstein appeared before his squadron, who were about to take horse. He had broken out of the small window in the detention room, because he did not want to stay behind in a serious matter when he had so often been at the front in a jest. The Captain of Horse cursed and swore; but what was to be done? There was no possibility of sending him back, particularly as the order had just arrived to clear Ferry Alley and the Coalmarket at once. The people had noticed his presence and howled with rage and delight. So they gave him a sabre and horse and let him go along, as he was safest with the squadron. Now when they broke through the narrow alleys, they fared roughly, as we and all the other units had. They were checked, the Captain of Horse circumspectly ordered them to ride slowly on, the platoons consequently became somewhat separated in the crowd, the people attacked and suddenly flung themselves at the last platoon, where Wildenstein was riding. They fell upon him and tried to pull him down from his horse, but with his bear-like strength he grabbed one man by the collar and threw him

like a child over the saddle in front of him. "I've got you!" he cried. According to the cuirassier's statement, it was the coppersmith himself. Through this delay, however, he had come away from the platoon with several men and was now in among the crowd. Those at the front had to look to themselves and did not immediately notice his absence with the darkness and the uproar. The few men with him defended themselves manfully, but they had to succumb; their horses were stabbed down under them, and then it was all over. When their comrades came back from the front, they had to content themselves with revenge.

"And so it went on until deep into the night. Up to then we were still the victors, but God knows what it would have come to in the end if the heavens hadn't now had some consideration. Perhaps with all the shooting, the smoke and fumes, there had been another thaw. It had been spitting for several hours, now it came to be heavy rain. It poured down from on high and the streets soon became a single lake; moreover, it was February, when the wet soaked bitter cold through warm furs. Then the resistance flagged more and more; anyone who still put up a fight was easily vanquished by us, and so peace came.

"The thaw continued for the whole of the next week and all stayed quiet. We buried our dead, tended our wounded, punished the prisoners and fetched those who were known to have taken part in the rebellion out of their hiding-places. The coppersmith, who was said to be a ringleader, was nowhere to be found and was never seen again. Whether he had fled, whether he had been killed, has never been discovered. We received reinforcement from all directions, and when clear weather returned,

everything was in the old order. Admittedly, the town looked dismal enough, and the Commandant remembered this night for the rest of his life. He was given a severe reprimand for having allowed things to go so far.

“That’s how it happened,” concluded Ralow. “If it hadn’t rained on the first evening, it would have broken out then. The second day was dry, and so it erupted. If rain hadn’t come again, we wouldn’t have brought it to a close so quickly or so effectively. In short, a rebellion will have its weather, and that’s why I said this evening: today isn’t the weather for a rebellion.”