

German Short Stories of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries  
**Jakob Julius David (1859-1906)**

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**The Last One**

Far away from the small town there was another settlement. It had developed around a hillock and it was formed of the houses and huts of the poorest of the poor. The hamlet had not even attained to a proper street, the buildings having rather crept up the eminence, being thrown haphazardly all over, and mostly lying very far apart from each other in unsociable misery. Some of them had clambered up to a considerable height; they now stood there, as if exhausted from the exertion of climbing, utterly crooked and hunched like heavily-breathing people. But on the peak there arose a stately monastery which almost took up the entire space with its mighty square of walls, with its church, which pierced the sky with a bold and pointed spire and whose bell, in the opinion of everyone, possessed a particularly euphonious and comforting sound. From there, one could look far out over the land, and it was perhaps for the sake of that prospect that Benedictines had settled here in the past, to all the more easily look over the general want and the great poverty all around, even when they had come to prosperity and even to wealth.

However, with the Hussite storms which passed over this tract of Moravia with especial fury, the monastery became poor. Weary of the eternal afflictions, the pious fathers moved away. And they did not return

when peace was finally restored to the land many years later. Others came in their stead: as swifts do with an abandoned falcon's nest, so did mendicant discalced friars settle down in the spacious building. They lived with the people and won much love for themselves as comforters in distress and patient advisers in crises of conscience; one could not be envious of them, for they all fared miserably enough. So the monastic house fell deeper and deeper into decline; if there was a lack of wood in winter, then one of the beautiful trees in the large garden was cut down. The cells were made smaller so that all would stay warm more easily on frosty days, which gave rise to an ugly redoubt. Only the church still remained beautifully decorated; and the cloister with its echoing tiles, under which the brothers were buried, the cool, running fountain and the beautiful ogival painted windows bore testimony to the old splendour. When a pane was broken by the turbulence of the wind or the carelessness of a brother, then ugly and common green glass was invariably inserted. The result was a disagreeable patchwork.

Now at the time when the second Maximilian<sup>1</sup> ruled over Austria with an unsteady hand and even under suspicion of secret leanings to heresy and Lutheranism, Father Zachäus Kühreiter presided over the monastery and the dozen monks whom it still housed. He was a quiet, peaceful man, of considerable height and portliness of body, and endowed with a mighty beard. Formerly, he had been able to preach very zealously and in a strong voice, and when he spoke of the fires of Hell while stroking

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<sup>1</sup> Maximilian II (1522-76), Holy Roman Emperor from 1564 until his death.

his beard forward, many a remorse-ridden soul took him for a symbol and a portent of the fire that never goes out, went home, and mended his ways, with the result that many a substantial donation went to the monastery; and considering its neediness, its delight at receiving these was certainly justified. But Father Zachäus was a gentle judge of penitents, being able to inveigh, in all his true and deep piety, only in the pulpit. Usually, he was willing to let everyone go their own way, and on no account did he ever meddle in things which did not necessarily concern his office. He liked to make jokes, and now he cherished only the one wish: to conclude his days in peace, just as the greater part of them, in all human probability, had already passed calmly by. And if there was one thing that gave him joy upon his election to Superior, then it was only his not having to go begging alms in the village or in the town so very often any longer; he had done this for so many years that he was weary of it and readily left this task to other and younger legs.

But when Father Zachäus did go walking in the surrounding country, the same companion was with him incessantly. It was a still young and sprightly Brother, handsome of countenance and strong of limb, but usually almost as reticent as the Prior was talkative. One could not send him to make a gathering; he knew none of those clerical jokes with which one induces people to compliance and open-handedness. Instead, he came grimly, and he had to leave unthanked and empty-handed for the most part. He was by this time only sent out so he might practise obedience and evangelical humility. But it helped him to those virtues as little as it did the Brothers to better bites to eat. For this reason, they did not like him; the

Prior, however, loved him exceptionally, and Berthold Bayer returned this feeling with the dull fidelity of a dog and the conscious affection of a man who is aware that he owes everything to another and has done so from an early age – for he was taken in when hardly more than a child.

And so the two of them were walking on a very grey day in late autumn. Twilight had fallen early; hasty clouds moved in the sky, pushing on top of one another urgently and zealously, so that the contours of each one showed vague and indistinct through the general press, and they sent forth a quite fine and inescapable drizzle. At the same time, the wind rustled brown and strongly-fragrant fallen leaves, and separate rosehip berries shone a lonely red, these spots of colour making all the more visible the great disconsolateness of the world. This put them out of humour, and even Zachäus fell silent and turned for home earlier than usual with his companion. They wandered through the town and wrapped themselves up more tightly in their habits. However, a peculiar bustle in the streets astonished them; for many people went with them towards the main square, into which the long alley they were walking through led. But many of these looked at the monks almost with hostility; only a few raised their caps. And the whirring sound of looms had fallen silent everywhere around them, even though it was nowhere near the hour at which the weavers customarily rose from their day's work.

The people dispersed at the market square; seeking protection from the drizzle in the surrounding foliage, they surged there pell-mell, in silence and an almost reverential earnestness. Expectantly, Berthold and Zachäus also tarried there. Then the mother church rang for vespers; pure and clear

came the answer from the monastery bell. "How prettily it sings!" said Zachäus. But Berthold shook his head; for a movement had come among the people. They entered the open space and everyone gathered in a semi-circle in front of the church. Some of them looked at the Brothers with curiosity, some almost with derision. Berthold clearly perceived this, but he did not venture to speak, because he would have had to raise his voice too much to be audible for hard-of-hearing Zachäus. Wenzel Prokupek, the ancient and wild blacksmith, suddenly turned around and looked at the Prior with fiery, angry eyes under bushy white brows: "Do you want to hear and embrace the pure doctrine too, cleric?" he cried. And when Zachäus shook his head, because he had to think how he could answer, then the giant gave a shrill laugh and others followed suit, leaving Zachäus silent in embarrassment.

All at once – a deathly silence. On a kerbstone stood a man who had emerged from the crowd all of a sudden. His gaunt figure stood out sharply from the grey walls of the church; he began a German psalm in a clear voice, and the solemn melody floated in stateliness through the heavy air. Then he spoke vehemently, passionately, of the privations which those who confessed the true faith had to bear – and here he pointed, as if for the sake of contrast, at the two monks, who felt everyone's eyes fixed upon them with deep enmity that same moment – for it was better to serve the false than to proclaim the truth. "We live in caves, and in the solitudes we cry to our God; they call with bells, and they think to stupefy Him with incense and myrrh. But He hears us, us, us!" – "Us, us, us!" cried the crowd in ceremonial reply, striking their breasts. He spoke of everlasting

damnation and of the guilt of those who pervert the pure Word. Shrieking female voices and ardent, convulsive sobs with lunatic exclamations rose to the heavens. Then another hymn was sung with such reverence that Berthold and Zachäus did not dare to leave. Then deathly silence again; there was no sound in the square, those who had filled it but a short while ago had disappeared, and the two of them stood alone and looked at each other. Finally, Berthold broke out with: “And you? What do you say to such castigation?” Zachäus stayed silent.

“By God and the Gracious Virgin! What do you say to such blasphemy and vituperation of the Holy?”

Zachäus stayed silent.

“Are you also apostate or losing your faith? Speak!”

“He spoke well.”

Berthold flared up. “I don’t understand you...”

“Then come!” They walked, side by side, in silence for a while. Then Zachäus began:

“He spoke well: for the people understood him and were moved in their hearts and more devout than when with us. His having done amiss towards the true faith and the thrice-only God is something I feel and know. But – it is not for me to act for God. He is stronger than me and will strike him when He wishes to and the time is right. I cannot and will not anticipate him. Do you understand, Berthold?”

“I understand; but this contradicts everything that our Holy Church is wont to proclaim and desire from her priests!”

“That may be. But I am old and tired.”

“And what will you do? What if the false doctrine spreads?”

“It will.”

“And if it takes root in the monastery?”

“It will. I cannot oppose anyone. But I shall not turn apostate, and were I the last one to keep the true faith.”

“And you will not invoke the worldly arm?”

Zachäus smiled. “Didn’t you hear Prokupek? He is the mayor, and whose side will he take? And should blood flow?”

“You are too gentle and too kind, Zachäus.”

“That may be. I am as I was.”

Berthold became embarrassed. “Yes, you are as you were. I know you. You have been kind all the days of your life. I haven’t forgotten how you took in your arms the lost boy you found in the snowed-over field and carried him for two leagues to the monastery, and brought him up with love. I know it well.”

“Then do not speak of it. I was younger then.”

“And I’m to hear you reviled simply for your garb?”

“Then I myself am not hurt.”

They were before the monastery now, and with bowed heads, and crossing themselves, as is seemly, they set foot in the House of the Lord.

That same night, Mayor Prokupek’s eldest grandchild was awoken by a sudden shining light which fell upon his eyelids. His grandfather stood by his bed; he was fully dressed, and in the uncertain and flickering light which ran over the mighty figure and was thrown back in a reddish hue from an old, polished morion, he looked so spectrally threatening that the

boy was frightened and huddled into his pillows. But Wenzel shook him. "Don't be afraid, get up and come," he whispered hoarsely, and the child obeyed. The two of them went into the workshop first; the old man searched among some old junk, lifting iron poles with astonishing strength and laying them down softly so they did not clink. At the very bottom there lay a massive sword. He tied it to his hips. "The signs are here." The blade glittered bright and sharp when he drew it out of the sheath, and the boy comprehended what his grandfather had been working on ever and oft in his workshop, alone, after the end of the working day. Then a spade was pressed into his hand, the mayor grasped a second one, threw the pinewood spill away and carefully trod it out, after which he cautiously locked the smithy. But instead of turning towards the house, he walked out into the open. A fierce gale struck at them with strong and heavy pinions. It was very dark; the houses stood shapeless at their side. The monastery on the hill towered immense in the air; their path led them past, and Prokupek wrathfully shook his fist at it. The boy became afraid, and he ventured no word; he felt himself growing weary and did not dare to let a sound of complaint pass his lips; the frequent gusts of wind cramped his breast. But the ninety-year-old had no eyes for his suffering and felt none of those alarms which shifted through his grandson's soul.

A forest received the wanderers. Alpine firs formed it, serious and dark guardians which kept out the attack of the November wind. So it was fairly quiet among them; only, there was a whistling, singing, and snapping in the treetops, dry twigs fell to earth with a crash, and there was a trickling of dead needles which covered the ground and made it smooth and

uncertain for the foot. In their midst a beech-tree stood and shimmered, with its bare white bark, almost ghostlike through the deep darkness. Prokupek came to a halt here; he bent down and gathered windfallen wood, enough of which lay around; a fire was lit, and it rose, smouldering with heavy smoke, to the heavens. Then he measured ten paces from the trunk; a field-stone, completely overgrown with moss, lay there. "This is the place; ten paces to the north," the wild man murmured. They both rolled the stone, not without difficulty, from its place. Then, humming an old, gloomy tune, which sounded like the blow of sword on shield, Prokupek began to dig, and his grandson copied him. A "Stop!" The mayor knelt down and began to burrow with his bare hands. He pulled out a thing wrapped in faded and threadbare silk. He threw the shreds away, and a golden goblet shone... "This is the chalice!" he said gravely and solemnly.

"This is the chalice," the boy repeated, reverently. "And how beautiful it is, and how shiny and shimmering its gold!"

Prokupek sat down on a root-gnarl. "Come here, lad. This is the chalice, I told you, and I helped to bury it here. I was just your age, and my grandfather was just as old as I am now."

"And what is the chalice?"

"The symbol of our Faith. For only our lips are Catholic; our hearts have remained Hussite."

"And what is the difference, grandfather?"

"We do not want any monks. I don't know how many monasteries my late grandfather helped to set on fire. That must happen again. The pure wine of faith must be administered from the pure chalice again. Christ

did not spill His blood for the tonsured ones alone. We too wish to partake of Him. That is what the stranger preached today. And his being allowed to do this for a third time without their burning him, that is a sign that the time has come and the chalice will travel again. And behind it we'll march through the land with our swords on our hips. Do you understand, boy?"

"I understand, grandfather."

"Prokupek rose to his feet. He hid the chalice in his breast and turned for home. And sunk in thought, it took long for him to notice that the boy was tugging his garment; at last, he came to a halt. "What do you want now?" "You speak of fighting and hate; but the predicant said nothing about that."

The mayor laughed: "You fool, we keep silent about that. We preach love and the pure doctrine, and the rest comes of itself." And as he strode onwards, he began to sing, very loudly and in a full voice, the grim battle-song:

"For the holy cup, for the doctrine pure,  
For the blood which our dying Lord shed,  
To find death in battle is our desire,  
No comrades we seek but the dead.  
We wish to inherit the Realm of the Blessed  
Through combat and long-lasting war,  
Though behind us there be silent emptiness  
And before us disaster may roar.  
And the shields so void, and the towns so waste,  
All doused and drenched with God's wrath,

To our work! To our work! For the cup, for the faith,  
For the blood that was shed on the Cross!”

He had not finished a second repetition when the high-pitched boy’s voice joined in and sang in unison with him. Prokupek nodded approvingly, and they came home in harmony and song, the representative of an ancient hatred for the Church from bygone times, and the child, in whom it had only just been instilled, but instilled for all future days. And he already clenched his fist when walking past the monastery, as he had seen his grandfather do shortly before.

On the next day, the predicant was not there. In his stead, the mayor stood on the kerbstone and preached. Full of ireful and venomous resentment were his words; before the end, he held up the hidden chalice, and the townspeople, who had preserved their Hussite memories so long and so tenaciously as had happened nowhere else, sank down on their knees and broke out into resounding cheers. Many were already thinking of attacking and looting the monastery. But that was not the intention of Prokupek, who shrank back from giving the sign for acts of violence in the district. “How do you bring the fox out of his cover?” he asked. “You starve him out, you starve him out!” came the many-voiced reply. “So you know the means.”

From that hour on, not even the slightest charitable donation flowed into the monastery.

When the Brothers came to beg for alms, they barely received an answer. No harm was done them in the town, at least; but spiteful little tricks were played on them. In some houses, what was rotten and yet had

the appearance of edibility was picked up, and the wives secretly, as if they had to hide what they were doing from their husbands, slipped it to the supplicants, who then gained nothing from the trouble of carrying home what they had hastily bundled together but vexation and perhaps an evil smell. Initially, they thought this was pure chance; but when Father Kitchener was amazed at the hens not laying a single fresh egg any more, they recognised, with distress, the ill-will of the townspeople and avoided them. But now those who went to make a gathering were openly mocked. The boys shouted “Baldy” after them, as after the Prophet Elisha, and no avenging bear appeared and tore them to pieces, as one of his forefathers had done to the insolent mockers in the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> It vexed many of them that not even the slightest wonder would happen anymore; they did not comprehend why they were toiling and moiling in honour of God if He was not going to assist them in any way, and they moved out and did not come back. It also became ever more toilsome to obtain even the most basic necessities; for the apostasy may have begun in the town, but it spread quickly and ever further. As birds of passage, who perceived the change in the times and winds blowing in their favour, the predicants had emerged all over. It befell one Brother that he was given hard blows in a village at night and had dogs set on him. He did not think his vow made this obligatory, and after saying as much to the Prior, he took his stick and left. For others, the chagrin was too great and the profit too slight; they were not in the monastery for that. Father Kitchener soon felt himself to be

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings 2:23-24: “And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare two and forty children of them.”

utterly superfluous; he fled from this feeling and, at the same time, and, at the same time, from the few who had still stayed true. The gatekeeper imitated him; the verger forsook his service, for nobody came to have their confession heard, or to mass, other than wretched women who had previously enjoyed good things here, or half-grown children. And these crept fearfully into the church and cautiously stole away from the place to which they were now bound only by old habit, hope for the return of better times, and a secret fear they might then be made to pay for their apostasy. However, nobody else felt such an apprehension; the new doctrine had clearly conquered, and the main church could barely hold the number of its confessors. They passed in through the main gate, as they had previously had to stand before the gate. "That is the new," Zachäus said gloomily to Berthold, who alone had remained with him; he said this so a sound would break the great silence which had fallen over the monastery, which only the voice of the bell sounded through, to fall silent, unheeded, after a short and fearful ringing...

A time full of suffering had begun for the last two Brothers. Zachäus bore it with the patience of the old man who knows the times and how they change, and to whom everything appears as only a transition to a final and uncertain destination. Not so Berthold. His youthful strength rose up against the helplessness to which he saw himself damned; he was depressed by the pointless existence he led, standing guard at an abandoned and lost post, without even hope of being relieved. In addition, winter had come marching in with severe frosts and endless evenings. Sometimes they lacked the bare necessities, even light. And when they sat

together in the one chamber which housed the two of them, and the old man's monotonous voice, which droned from the breviary, fell silent, so that no sound stirred anymore but the cracking of the green wood which warped and crackled in the stove, and the mournful humming and singing whistle of the nightly wind in the chimney, then very angry and sinful thoughts came to Berthold, and he quarrelled with God. The hot blood, which had led him out of his parental home at an early age and driven him around the world, until he had fallen down at the roadside in the frost and thought to look Death in the face, screamed inside him. It had, indeed, become calmer through the years of intimate companionship with Zachäus, but it was not completely subdued. Sometimes smoke billowed through the chamber; then Zachäus fell into a severe fit of coughing, pressed his hand to his breast, and his reddened eyes looked plaintively and filled with sorrow, from a face contorted with pain, at his companion. Berthold felt his sorrow also, and the worry about what would be when the old man left this earth did not yield from his soul. A secret reproach that he had done absolutely nothing for the Brother who had saved his life and watched over his days, ate away at his heart. But what to do? Abide until the end and watch? Their need grew, and everything that had been preserved from a better past was fast becoming exhausted. And one day, Berthold took the beggar's sack and stepped before the Prior. "I'll try my luck!" "You?" answered Zachäus. "But you've never been able to do it, have you?" "I'll try," the young man replied, "we can't go on like this any longer. Or are you to go out with me in storms and driving snow?" "Then may the Lord bless your way and soften the hearts of men. For we are in

His hands, and He alone can protect us. And don't forget that I am alone and could easily worry about you, my Brother. Do not be vehement, but learn to beg. If you are scorned, then think of Him who took scorn and abuse upon Himself for us, and yet He was God's only son. Joke with the children and you will win over the parents. And so: God's peace be with you, Berthold!" "Peace be with you, Zachäus!"

It was a raw winter's day and a hard walk for Brother Berthold. When he trudged through the brittle and crunching snow, his habit hampered his stride. He tucked it up higher, and the wind, which whistled around him, got caught in the folds. He did not even venture to call upon the townspeople; he also made a wide detour around the villages, from whose chimneys a hospitable smoke arose, clambering up into the pure air in curls of grey until it flowed away into one with the grey of the sky. Past the black forest, in which grim Prokupek had dug up the chalice that time, he came; behind it lay lonely and scattered farmsteads on the slope of the hilly country, which gradually rises there to the border with Silesia. In that wilderness, the profession of the old faith might have been preserved; at least, that aversion could not have sprung up which the few people he had met had shown him simply on account of his clothes. For he found cause enough to practise silent endurance, as his master had recommended him; not *one* child ran to him to kiss his hand, though formerly this had happened to him only too often. They made ugly faces at him or stared impassively and insolently in his face.

At length, the midday hour was over, he came to a lonely farmstead. It lay there, broad and self-sufficient; a wide, white tract adjoined the back

door and came to an end before a sizeable spinney on the crest of the hill, which marked the bounds of the village fields. A fat dog lay, with sleepily blinking eyes, spread out on the threshold, over which a straw mat had been laid. He rose to his feet as the visitor approached, snuffled peacefully and curiously up his legs and then stretched himself out again, lazily and serenely. This of itself seemed a good omen to Berthold; filled with courage, he walked into the house, knocked at a door and opened it. A large room, almost oppressively sultry, lay before him; around a mighty table, farmhands and maids sat at their meal. A giggling and whispering broke out when he entered. "What does the cleric want? The shaveling! The baldpate! Look, look!" But a glance at the completely unadorned walls had already told him that he had erred in his way and come into a Protestant house; he was about to withdraw, shyly and swiftly, when a deep voice rang out: "Move closer together and hold your tongues. He shall eat with us, the cleric."

Berthold hesitated. "Sit down, I said. You're hungry and you shall eat with us. I have ordered!" the voice cried to him.

He obeyed. No more words were exchanged during the meal. Then they rose up, one after another, wiped their spoons, placed them on the table, and walked away with a pious salutation. He too wished to head for home; then he heard, "Wait, I'd like to talk with you before you go. The beggar's sack doesn't seem to weigh you down very much, you didn't even take it off while eating."

He became embarrassed. "I forgot!"

"Indeed! You forgot, did you?" A certain scorn and a faint

watchfulness lay in the question. "Haven't the people perhaps forgotten? They have become wiser and no longer want to be judged by you. They are right. I say this, Ludmila Prokupek." And she struck the table hard and emphatically with her closed hand.

"Prokupek?" cried Berthold, startled.

She laughed. "Aha! You're from that dump of crazy weavers? Are you afraid of the biggest fool? My father-in-law Wenzel? He is mad and would like to make everyone like he is. He's already primed his grandson. He also tried to talk me round – it's not a week since. He sat there, where you're sitting, with his mouldy chalice. And when I ask him, 'What's the thing for, if not for selling?' he tells me some rubbish about an embodiment of what people want but don't rightly know what to express. Nonsense! I desire nothing that I don't know, and I won't be deceived by old stories. I don't like symbols; Ludmila wants to live, and work, and nobody should stick their oar in. I told him that, and said it straight out; it gladdens me when I can do the like to him, the foolish fool!"

She had stood up while speaking; a light red had risen in her brown cheeks, as it sometimes flits over the leaves of Virginia creeper before they begin to turn purple all over. The corner of her mouth with the black mole underneath, which was repeated on her neck, twitched vigorously; tall, strong, and completely without blemish, from her black-haired head down to her feet, she stood before the monk, who stared at her almost in astonishment and with some timidity. Her night-dark eyes flashed with thunder. Then, more calmly, she added:

"You mustn't think me savage. I'm not usually, and my people have

it good with me, when they obey. But I don't like drivel, I had my fill of that when my husband was alive. He was one of those for singing psalms and praying. What's the meaning of that? If you've done something bad, then hang yourself; if you've done nothing, then the Lord is a man too and wants to rest. Am I right or not? I see! I shouldn't ask you such a question! It's your business, isn't it. And a fine one it is!" She smiled contemptuously, and it cut him to the soul. "Well, praise God, it goes worse with each passing day. And now come. You've had to listen to your sermon for once instead of giving it, cleric! I'll give you something; I have it, and it might annoy Prokupek if he gets any wind of this. Are there many of you?"

"Only one more beside myself."

"That's too many anyhow, another wastrel."

"He is old and the best of men," Berthold objected.

"Then it's at least a shame that nothing proper became of him."

She filled his shoulder-bag abundantly, and the monk received what she gave him, not without shame. He was almost glad to come away from the fierce woman who refused every expression of thanks and every benediction. Also, he was anxious about Zachäus, and yet, when he sat with the solitary man, his thoughts flew back to the farm in the wilds and to Ludmila, so he could not join his voice with a full and fervent heart to the prayer of thanksgiving which Zachäus lifted to praise the Lord, He who directs men's hearts and softens their harshness.

He came again, not without an inner fight, not without having previously knocked in vain on many doors. Bitter necessity drove him. But this time he was received rudely enough. Why, what was he thinking?

Once was enough; feeding up idlers – she was not born to do that. Did God's commandment not apply to him alone, that man must earn his bread in the sweat of his brow? "What, you'll pray for me? I like to sort my affairs out by myself. Work! A thresher is sick, you do his share!"

"But I haven't learned how," said Berthold, who simply had no idea how to deport himself or what to do when facing her. She laughed.

"Haven't learned! They'll soon show you how. It's not difficult. Give it a try at least, show good will, and I'll show it you. Such a strong fellow going begging!"

He obeyed, and it was an odd enough sight, the black habit with the white cincture mingling with the threshers, and the black sleeves with the white linen sleeves underneath labouring to move in the right triple time. Frau Ludmila watched, and high-spirits and schadenfreude laughed in her black eyes when he stood opposite her, and her farmhands could contain their laughter at the helping stranger only with difficulty. But he conducted himself handily and industriously enough until the time came for the midday meal. After that, the woman dismissed him; she did not give him as much as the previous time, but she gave abundantly all the same. And this time, her donation did not weigh upon his mind; he was glad that it had been earned, even if only in small part. But he reported nothing of his adventure to old Zachäus; he only regarded the calluses on his hands secretly and not without pleasure. For in anyone who is sprung from farmer's blood, there lives, more often than not, a desire for and a delight in this occupation which do not easily die away.

It is needless to relate how often Brother Berthold went the way to

Ludmila's farm in the wilds from that time on. It happened often enough; she always gave him work to do, and one day, when he was toiling away chopping wood, she laughed: "Must it be done in your habit? Does that consecrate the wood?" He looked at her inquiringly. "What are you to do? There are still all kinds of clothes of my late husband hanging up in the bedroom, you're the same size. Try something on!" The farmer's garb became him well, and she made no secret of her liking him in it; only the tonsure still revealed the monk, and she mocked him much about that, and the farmhands could not but assist her. He also got to know her child, a big-boned boy with a dull face, heavy of limb and morose. Berthold flattered him. But Ludmila told him to forbear: "I know for sure that he's ugly. I like him, but nobody must pretend to like him. You shouldn't lie, and you don't have to any longer, for you don't go begging now." He did not desist until he had succeeded in winning the affection of the mulish boy; for all the others liked him, and because he was a scholar in their eyes and yet, at the same time, able and of uncommon strength, they even respected him. He, for his part, was cheerful, and sometimes he was astonished at himself and his happiness, which he had not known for so long. So Berthold Bayer led a double life which was divided into two parts that did not have the slightest thing in common: not costume, not way of living, nor anything else. But Zachäus had no inkling of this; as soon as his companion returned home to the monastery, his old dulled spirit and his old taciturnity came over him. They were now even intensified by the yearning for the free and manly life whose charms he had tasted of and which he could no longer do without. It was true that it gladdened him to be

able to provide for the old man, and to do more to this purpose by his own efforts than Zachäus suspected; but he gradually began to feel anxious in so discordant an existence, without being able to see whither or to what kind of end it would lead. Were sedentary brooding, bitter necessity, and lonely misery to be there at the destination of his days, as he saw them descending upon Zachäus?

Such thoughts had certainly never entered his mind before. But the storm that had come over the world, signifying a mighty spring-tide, a stirring and sprouting of unimagined vigour for some, but bringing to others the fall and disposal of their most beautiful hopes, had brought both together in this one man. The community to which he had belonged and which had protected him, had fallen apart; it lived on only in one man, though the one to whom Berthold felt himself inextricably bound. His devotion to the old church was still intact, her rules still held good for him. But the habit he wore had become disagreeable to him, and he felt it to be odious mummery when he had to put it back on. He felt darkness impending and hard struggles; he was unconsciously drawn to the woman, to whom he only believed himself grateful for deliverance, perhaps from death from starvation, for many a kindness and even for the revelation of a new life that was worthy of a man. But – he was afraid of Ludmila and her proud and imperious way, and yet he suffered when he did not see her...

There was a conflict inside him and he could not untangle it. He visited his soul with strong torments, and these sometimes made him groan loudly in dreary and shivering twilight hours. Then an echo answered him. Zachäus sighed. Otherwise, they were both silent almost all

the time; the one, weary from the misery of all, the other, from the troubles of his own heart. And the constraint of having to conceal and keep silent about his innermost feeling ate away in the breast of the young man, who felt himself to be deceiving his male friend or his female one, according to time and place...

The end of winter was near. With every hour that the day gained, Berthold rejoiced, as if it were given to him alone and more time allocated to him. Already, those on the farm were preparing for the incipient work in the fields; a warm breath of joyful activity passed through the entire house and provoked comparisons with the way things were in his home. As he was just getting ready to leave there one day, Ludmila beckoned to him. "I want a word with you. You mustn't come here anymore. Understand?"

"And why not?" he cried, shocked.

"Because I forbid you to! I'll have you thrown out! I'll set the dogs on you, I'll send the servants at you, understand?"

"Yes, but I've never insulted you, Ludmila."

"That now? Who dares to? But I won't be called Shaveling's sweetheart. That's what they call me. Clear off, you hear?"

"But are you that?"

"I don't want to be."

He grasped her hand. "Then I thank you for your kindness. I would have gone to ruin without you, and I surely shall now. God bless you in all that you do."

"If I'd only let you starve, it would have been better for me!"

"So you hate me?" he said lamentingly. "And I don't know how I'll be

able to live without you. You are dear to me, very dear.”

“And what if you are to me likewise? What’s the use? Should I earn the affronts? Make myself even more defamed?” Her eyes flashed, she put her hands on her hips. She was very beautiful in her rage, and Berthold looked at her in amazement without speaking.

“I daresay you’re right,” he sadly replied. But she became even angrier: “So is this a man?” she cried. “Goes away and lets himself be driven off like a horse from the haybox? And doesn’t even ask: Do I have to? Oh fie!”

“Yes, but what am I to do?”

She walked up to him so close that his eyes were mirrored in hers. The hot breath of her mouth blew over him and stirred the hair on his temples. “What are you to do? Let your hair grow, throw your habit away.”

“And then?”

She laughed. “Then? Then come and wed me.”

“Ludmila! My vow?”

“It doesn’t count. You swore to the church. Does the church feed you? I did that. A vow?” She shrugged her shoulders at it, she flicked it with her fingers. She laughed at him with strong, white teeth. Her whole attitude asked which was dearer to him – she and her vibrant life or a dead dogma and an old oath.

Intoxicating ardour rose to his head. “I shall do that! ...”

“Then stay here.”

“I cannot. I must say farewell to Zachäus and receive leave.”

She took his hands in a strong grip. “He will not let you, Berthold.”

“He will. And I would not like to bring too much disloyalty, Ludmila! – not more than must be – into marriage. Not that towards my friend on top of that towards my faith!”

They kissed one another; a passion which had long smouldered quietly and among ashes lay in the kiss. Then they parted; she, proud and happy, he, depressed. Zachäus’s careworn figure stood in the sun of his happiness and cast a long shadow. He thought with shame of his zealous vainglory on that day when the predicant had first preached, and of his friend’s quiet nature, he who had not deserted the faith, whereas he himself had turned apostate and violated his oath in the hour of temptation. But could he not perhaps persuade him to share the happiness that had blossomed for his companion of many years? He could not really believe this; he also did not really know if such a guest would be welcome to Ludmila, and he reproached himself for not having at once firmly demanded he be able to bring him along. And yet – he clearly saw that he could not give the woman up, now that he knew about himself and her and her feelings. He was still in the spell of her presence; he could not escape her any longer, and he hardly wanted to.

But it was with an anxious heart, nevertheless, that he reported to Zachäus what he had to tell him. The old man listened in silence; he only slumped lower down, he only became more wretched and miserable during the passionate and confused words of his Brother and sole friend. And he gave no reply when the latter laid his request before him and implored him, on his own authority, to follow him and share his fate. But his silence was a negation. Then he spoke after a painful while, in a tired, flat

voice: "I have old legs; they do not belong under new tables, and they cannot run after any other fate. I shall stay where I am and where I have been for so long. But you go. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan."<sup>3</sup>

"Then come, Zachäus."

The same senescent nodding of the head again. Then: "Go, and may things turn out for you as you hope and as I wish."

"Then give me your hand!"

He did it; and once more, "You look strange to me. It is the clothes you will be wearing from tomorrow. I see them already on your body. You have become a stranger to me. That is what time does – do you still remember the day when I saw you for the first time?"

"I grieve for you, Zachäus."

"I do not want that. Farewell, my Brother!"

"Then bless me, that I may fare well!"

He started. "May I do that? You? I would have to scold you. I shall not; the zeal of God is not in me. So kneel down. I was your father. Not your Superior, your father, who now goes into the wilderness, gives you his blessing for the new paths you will walk henceforth. Farewell, and God's blessing be on your head!"

"And on yours a thousandfold, Zachäus! And may I not?"

"No, you may not! Unless chance should bring me before your gate. But that, I hope, I shall be spared."

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<sup>3</sup> David's lament in 2 Samuel 1:26.

Zachäus was alone. He heard footsteps receding into the distance, hesitantly at first, then fast and faster. Finally, a door somewhere far away slammed shut. He sank down on his knees and prayed. And while praying, he wept impetuously like a child, and bitterly and inconsolably like a man whose heart has been rent by hopelessness and despair. Night fell, and dawn arose. The day flowed away, and not a single sound of a human voice reached his ear. Again, night beshaded the world, and again it fled before the thrusting approach of the sun. Then it came to his mind that this day was the day of his monastery's patron saint. He waited until the hour of mass drew near, then he climbed up the tower with weary feet and trembling knees. With a weak hand he rang the bell; its unequal peals made their sluggish and disordered way into the air, which was grey and filled with mist. Afterwards he climbed down; not a soul had followed the call to worship, not even a boy who could have been helpful to him for the sacred rite. He performed it as well as he could on his own. Then he locked the church, and he took his beggar's sack upon his shoulder, although for a moment the thought flashed through his head if it would not be better to wait in quiet resignation for the end, which could not be much longer in coming. But he deemed that to be sinful; it would be more pious and dignified to drain the bitter cup that was ordained for and presented to him.

He had a long and sad walk that day. Only now and then was there a ray of sunlight in the sky, which revealed to him the true dreariness of his snow-covered way; nowhere a word of greeting or any alms. He was hungry, and when he reeled from weariness and weakness on a village

street, a servant cried after him, "Look at the drunken monk!" Zachäus turned around and looked at the mocker, reducing him to silence. He completely lost his way, and at last he could not go on for sheer exhaustion. The beggar's sack on his shoulder, though still empty, weighed more heavily than it had ever done before when it had been so full. He sat down impassively in the snow and waited with resignation, opposite a large farm, to see if he would recover his breath or find his end here, alone and languishing like a hunted and wounded red deer. Then he heard the gate of the front garden and a strong woman walked out. She caught sight of the weary man and stopped in her tracks. Then she beckoned to him: "Another one? Come!" He was led into the parlour and well fed; then she gave him many kinds of food. But when he wanted to bless the woman, she laughed: "Let that be; it doesn't count with me... I'm a Protestant. But the man who will be my husband – he's in the town today preparing everything such a man must do – he himself was once a shaveling like you. I did it for his sake!" "Throw it down before her feet!" a voice cried inside Zachäus. But he controlled himself. Was not this the bitter cup? "Drain it for the sake of that deep humility which is enjoined upon you!" he said to himself. And out loud: "Then take my gratitude, if my blessing be not acceptable to you. And the Lord, in whom we both believe, be with you." And in this way, with a handshake, Zachäus Kühreiter departed from Ludmila Prokupek's house.

It was still high day, and yet a greyness had already gone through the world. Grey was the sky, grey the mist which billowed in the distance, grey and discoloured even the old snow at his feet; grey crows passed

overhead in dense flights or flew up before his steps. Otherwise, he met no living creature; only, when he turned onto the road, leaving the tracks across the fields, two figures arose who had been crouching in the ditch. A woman and a girl; they kissed his hand and knelt down before him. He blessed them in astonishment: so there really were still people to whom his garb and his doctrine were worthy of reverence? He placed his hand on their heads and walked on. Past overthrown pillars of saints, the sight of which pained him. And yet a slight hope for the future had returned to him.

He came into the monastery; and the grey desolation and the disconsolateness gripped him again when he walked on through the silence of the cloister, where his steps echoed with an unearthly and yet powerful sound. He looked down at the ground; cross after cross greeted his eyes, and a strong yearning stirred in his tired and tormented heart. Here slept his predecessors, a long succession, of which he was the last, and which throughout centuries – with his want of erudition, he did not even know how many – had not been broken even once. Now it threatened to break off for ever. And he sorely longed to lie with them and share their sleep. He hoped his to be even deeper and more dreamless than theirs had been. For he knew that nobody would rouse him from it, once he was interred here; no clattering of sandals of reverent brothers of the Order could ring out over his head anymore.

Two days later, the former verger was driven by curiosity to see if there was still any life in the monastery. He found Father Zachäus Kühreiter in his cell. His motionless hands held the rosary, and his face was undisturbed. He had died, quietly, and, as it appeared, peacefully,

after his custom and the habit of his life. He was the last one, and after him the monastery fell to utter ruin.

### **The World Tour of the Little Man from Trnava<sup>4</sup>**

The little man from Trnava was – and this is really saying something – the most superfluous junior clerk in a very big and powerful bank.

He did not stand out from his numerous professional colleagues in Vienna in any way at all, he dressed as elegantly as he could, was quite handsome, and liked to visit a café for literati.

Now that earns one a reputation for intellectual assiduity which at least does no harm. And because journalists always frequented it, armed with and spreading around the very latest news, then one sat at the source of a great deal of scandal. Having knowledge of that could only be of use.

And so he passed quite some time behind his mountain of newspapers, which were here stacked up pretty much in front of everyone, and listened with the greatest excitement to every word that was spoken at the next table, to every joke which, often carefully thought up at home, was improvised here; laughed wholeheartedly, and was well-liked, because kibitzers form part of the splendour of this society.

And things went on in this way for years. Until an event took place which made *him* a topic of conversation he was to draw on for the rest of his life. The little man from Trnava took a trip round the world, and that made him a curiosity even in this coffee-house which was visited by

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<sup>4</sup> Trnava is a small city in Slovakia. Here, “little man” means “common man.” The first sentence plays on “little man... little clerk... big bank.”

nothing but curiosities. For he had not hit the jackpot; not even the headwaiter, who, educated by decades of experience, could sense the stylized, aging Goethe of the future in the unbearded grammar school pupil, saw in him an irrepressible urge to explore. And notwithstanding the fact that our banks employ superfluous – regarding their use – junior clerks, paying them so much as to enable them to go on world tours – no managing directors in Vienna are so unfathomably generous.

Of course, every one in the coffee-house knew each other. And they took no little pride in the two aristocrats who came from time to time. They were both First Lieutenants, the one in the Dragoons, the other in the Hussars.

In particular, the one in the Hussars caused a certain stir wherever he appeared. He was a very handsome young man, sparkling with zest for life and with strength. Not stupid at all; only very idle in his manner of speaking. Was not used to exert himself, and yet certain of his effect and sure to please where he wanted to.

As a rule, they took a niche for themselves, drank cognac, stared out into the street and thought not so much.

As far as business was concerned, they had no reason to be here: for moneylenders did not frequent the café, for good reasons, and they had no other connection with literature than the interest they felt in an actress who was in vogue just then, and for whom they even made sacrifices. Nevertheless, the Dragoon would sometimes sit down at the regulars' table, listen a little very absent-mindedly, smile, drink another cognac, and leave.

And so the great day arrived in the life of the little man from Trnava, who had in the meantime adversely possessed a modest little corner at the table of celebrities. For suddenly – it was still quite early in the day – the Dragoon walked up to the company at table and asked in his calm, haughty way: “Does one of the gentlemen perhaps want to take a trip round the world?” Not a word more.

It struck like a thunderbolt. And just like a thunderbolt, it stunned them. Was it a joke? The aristocrat’s face before them did not look like it was. A trip round the world! That appealed to everyone. But what was behind it? The little man from Trnava was the first to recover: “I do, Count,” he piped in his excitement.

The Dragoon scrutinised him. “You’ll get time off for so long? For half a year?”

The little man from Trnava was free from care on that score. He knew the importance of his position as well as anyone. “It won’t be easy, because I’ll be away a lot, but I’ll sort everything out.”

“That’s good. Then come to me tomorrow and I’ll tell you everything.” And he turned round and left with his comrade. Outside, the latter asked him: “Hey, who was the little man whom you so pally with?”<sup>5</sup>

“You think I can remember everyone I’m pally with?” For he was quite liberal with his friendships. Especially when he was far gone;<sup>6</sup> and in order to insult nobody, he was familiar with everybody. Whether the other dared to return it, was his business. “Cheerio!”

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<sup>5</sup> He addressed him with the informal word for “you” – “du” – instead of the polite “Sie.”

<sup>6</sup> “im vorgerückten Zustand” – In an advanced stage (of inebriation).

“Where are you going?”

“Home, just to write.”

“Write?” The Hussar’s voice choked. “You crazy?”

“Yes, write.” He raised his sword and looked on with great interest as a pretty girl gathered up her skirts to cross the road. Then he walked away with long strides.

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But Poldi Kirchnegger really did go home and really did write, deep into the night. And not even, as his comrade construed the matter to ease his concern, “love letters.”

He did it with a grim determination and suppressed fury. He did not even go to supper. The orderly had to bring it to his home. And he fortified himself with a nice amount of Rotspon,<sup>7</sup> and afterwards he partook of a cognac.

On the next day it started again. With the same seriousness, but with even greater wrath. Because an inherently dire undertaking does not exactly become more agreeable in the long run. Not until midday did he set foot on the pavements of Vienna for a little while. He ate, hastily drank a black coffee, and continued writing.

Finally, before the little man from Trnava was supposed to come, he was finished. He made several rapid, strong cuts in the air, rejoiced in his agility and strength, and glanced over his work. He was very satisfied with himself. All said and done – it would do, and it read reasonably well. If it

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<sup>7</sup> Red wine, imported from France in barrels.

had had to be, one could have pulled off the art quite passably.

Thank God – and every fibre of his splendid pride stirred – not in all eternity would that be necessary. But to make such a big deal of it, that was really ridiculous. He found this very amusing, and when the little man from Trnava knocked at his door, he naturally needed a moment to think about who the man standing there before him actually was and what he wanted with him; but he was very nice to him afterwards.

He gave him all the information. And the man from Trnava did not understand why this was desired of him, but he understood exactly what he had to do. For he was very bright, and the instructions were remarkable for their great clarity. One learns that when commanding. He received tickets, letters of recommendation, a pass card, a very acceptable sum of money, and letters with the strictest directions where each one was to be posted. And at the end, when he was about to leave, Kirchnegger also gave him all the travel handbooks which had caused him such evil hours. He scrutinised the world traveller, who stood before him quite heavily laden, with a critical and not entirely enthusiastic eye. “Just a little difference, how you look, wouldn’t hurt,” he remarked, and he was somewhat wrong to say so. For the little man from Trnava certainly could not be a match for him. But otherwise, he was a very fine-looking fellow and should pass muster. Poldi Kirchnegger could not, of course, give him a farewell handshake. For in his right hand he held a cigarette, and in his left, his riding-crop, because he naturally felt the need, after such taxing work, such an unaccustomed strain, to get on an even keel, first through a hard ride and afterwards through a few fitting diversions.

That very night, the little man from Trnava steamed towards the south. At first to Trieste. From there, further, ever further, towards the sunrise and its wonders. In every place where he presented himself, according to his instructions, he was received in a manner in which superfluous junior clerks of a bank, however big and powerful it may be, are not customarily greeted. His job sank ever more deeply into a misty recollection, he felt himself, with ever-increasing faith, to be the transformed Prince of fairy tales.

But the coffee house had a new and substantial topic for discussion. They spoke of Poldi Kirchnegger's outrageous whims; of the absurd jamminess and the pushiness of the little man from Trnava, who had in a way usurped what would actually have meant much more to another person.

The further away he travelled, the darker and uglier the portrait of his character appeared to those left behind. Over the course of several months, it was underpainted, with sincere devotion, ever darker. No picture postcards came? – Of course, he had become haughty. But if some did come – of course, he had to act snotty! It was difficult to do the right thing.

Moreover, Poldi Kirchnegger had disappeared. Quite without a trace, and without anybody having the slightest inkling where the fast-living young man, who had so often been the talk of the town for his audacious adventures, had got to.

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Poldi Kirchnegger was the future lord of a very considerable entailed estate. There were also all kinds of canonesses in the family who

mollycoddled the handsome and smart young man in the most outrageous manner.

He served for several years. He was supposed to quit as a Captain of Horse so he would have made something of himself before he took over the management of the extensive Bohemian estate and took a wife, one within his class of course. There was already an heiress on the horizon, who had no greater wish than to be Countess Fini Kirchnegger of Kirchnegg one day, and she knew that the people in her circles did not take things so very seriously before marriage, or sometimes even during it.

Now Poldi was, admittedly, going a bit overboard. But after all, that was only natural when women ran after him so! He was a brilliant horseman and was extraordinarily proficient in all the skills which befit a young cavalier. He understood horses like a horse-dealer and women like nobody else. If he took a fancy to one, that was it – he was all after her. For the rest, he had an exquisite lack of education, a naïve and invincible freshness. He enjoyed himself as only a robust and thoughtless racial man<sup>8</sup> can, and kept his resilience at all times.

So an incredible amount of money was spent, of course. No apanage could be sufficient, and what the numerous aunts contributed, with concern and yet also quiet pride in the splendid madcap, that did not last long. There was no usurer in the city of Vienna who had not had dealings with Poldi Kirchnegger. No business was too risky for him when he simply needed money again. And he did it with good humour. Thus he

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<sup>8</sup> "Rassenmensch" – a man who exemplifies his race.

once wore a dried plum as a watch fob. That was at the time when he had purchased two thousand sacks of Bosnian damsons to then hand them on to an intermediary of the helpful person for a quarter of the purchase price, all because he wanted to know how they look, these things on which one loses such an incredible amount of money.

On another occasion, he owned a locomotive park, sufficient to equip a very grand train of the second order. He also had to set up a picture gallery – the finest names were represented in it – he, whose enthusiasm for art did not in essence go beyond a joy in “living pictures.” Now, usury is strictly forbidden in our society and subject to severe penalties, but he who acquires Bosnian damsons or locomotives or genuine Rembrandts at five hundred guilders apiece, to then, without having seen them, and being dissatisfied with the possession, get rid of them as quickly as possible, he has bought and sold and so concluded a quite unassailable deal, which certainly pays well for the broker without in the least threatening him with danger or forfeiture of civic honour.

At that very time he was head over heels in love instead of, as was usually the case, letting himself be loved.

Poldi Kirchnegger had always had taste. It was in his blood. And so this time also there were certainly no objections to be made to the lady of his heart.

She was an actress. And she would even have had some talent, if she had not been unable to get around, for the manifold diversions and temptations of her life, to learning something.

So there were occasional successes, after which experts regretted

that such talents were not here properly directed or developed, that little Doris was, and would remain, essentially nothing more than a marvellously pretty showpiece.

She may not have even understood this regret. For things went swimmingly for her. Men swarmed around her and courted her, and there was no wish of theirs which she would have had to refuse. It was altogether too charming a situation.

And one could not imagine a sweeter beloved. She had no caprices and she was never peeved. And no woman could possibly be prettier than her. Full of grace, full of amiability: filled with the hunger for life of those who are granted only a short walk in the light. There was a sparkle in her soft, brown eyes, which were almost too big and too moistly shimmering.

Like a child – so good-natured was she. And there was something childishly good-natured even in her frivolity. She was happy to be given presents, and naturally took a great delight in jewellery. It looked so good on her. But she was not to be won with that alone. Her heart had to be in it also. And the jewellery which one man had overeagerly presented her with the day before, she gave back to him, if he was strapped for cash, the next day – to him or to the other man who had become dearer to her overnight.

At that time, there was no handsomer couple than these two. Everyone found this to be so, and people whispered when they appeared: He, bold, assured, and powerful; she, slim with a soft and shy fullness, just like a girl, and with such little hands that one simply could not understand how they could waste so much money. For Doris had as slight a grasp of the meaning of money as was humanly possible, and she gave no more

thought to her future than did a well-looking-after child.

And so they spent a most delightful, admittedly, also a wickedly expensive, time. And Poldi grew to like her more and more the longer he knew her, and how entertaining and how full of charming conceits she was. What people in his circles fear most – boredom – he never felt with her. And she spoke French quite superbly; and she could behave quite the lady to give secret vent to her wantonness, and she played the piano very prettily and sang couplets that had everyone laughing out loud. In short – the rumour arose that Poldi Kirchnegger had formally promised to marry Doris.

This caused no small sensation. The greatest, of course, in Kirchnegger Palace in Strohgasse Street. There, only two concepts were known, according to which everything in life had to be regulated: befitting one's rank and inconsistent with one's rank. Poldi keeping Doris was in perfect accord with his rank, for she was very chic. He certainly wasted more money with her than was necessary, but that was simply the done thing as a rule. However, it was highly inconsistent with his rank for him to wish to make her Countess Kirchnegger. That was a disaster and had to be thwarted at all costs.

But how? For the young man was extremely mulish and made all kinds of mysterious threats, which is in itself inconsistent with his rank. And so one family meeting after the other was held in Strohgasse Street with lawyers and "business friends" of Poldi being consulted, and at that time so many canonesses travelled between Prague and Vienna that serious consideration was given to putting on a new express train between these

two cities. An extremely fast one and with only first-class carriages, of course.

The outcome: Poldi had the choice: He *had to* quit and betake himself to an uncle who had the reputation of possessing profound knowledge of agriculture, in Slavonia, there to perfect himself in the science of agronomy. He irreverently paraphrased this as learning to load carts of dung. Or: He *ought to* take a trip round the world. Half a year and new impressions, that would surely suffice to make him forget Doris. Of course, a world-tour befitting his rank, correspondingly extended and with the obligation of presenting himself at the Consulate in every station, to compose an exhaustive report on his impressions for his relatives, and to have this, for the sake of security, certified conformably to order by the representative of the monarchy.

There was nothing to be done about this. Poldi Kirchnegger flew into a terrific rage and smashed a fair amount of china on his orderly. Leave Doris? "Never in all eternity!" or, as he expressed himself just to be on the safe side, "Not for a long time yet!" Quit and wear top boots in Slavonia? He thought not! Go on a trip round the world? Too dull, when one does not feel the slightest thirst for knowledge, or calling to be a travel writer, in one's bones...

Poldi Kirchnegger proved that a young aristocrat, in the present age, is still capable of any sacrifice for a great love. For he thought; he studied all kinds of travel handbooks effectively and earnestly, and he sat up deep into the night, not, however, in very fashionable company, but rather alone in his little room, and wrote ...

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And so the little man from Trnava travelled out into the blue and the ever bluer, ever towards new wonders in a trip that was itself like a wonder.

He carried out his orders meticulously – in the end, they were not so complicated or difficult to remember – and he settled ever more comfortably and confidently into his role.

Once he had paid his duty visits, and posted the one or the several letters, according to which the length of his stay had been predetermined, then he enjoyed himself and looked around with crafty and ever sharper eyes.

But he thought of the necessary return home with mounting dread, when the fairytale gloss which had broken all of a sudden into his life would have to trickle away, and nothing would remain but the most superfluous junior clerk of a large bank, whose dispensability for at least a full half year had been officially certified. He therefore felt like a man who would need to live on that gloss for the rest of his life.

The most noble parents received the desired reports from the tenant in tail with every due post, and they were deeply delighted with them and with their own cleverness. It cost – fine; but it could not possibly fail to have an effect. Incidentally, it was astonishing how well the young man could write. The canoness aunts, who often got around to reading books, found this, and it was actually a real shame that he had never wanted to learn; and the letters also gave a great deal of pleasure to that young lady who had no greater wish than to be mistress at Kirchenegg one day.

In the meantime, Doris and Poldi Kirchnegger did not exactly fare

badly either.

He had been left with a very tidy sum of money from the amount determined for the world-tour, for the entire amount that was settled on him did not find its way to his deputy.

Now, it was necessary to budget sensibly with this, and so a villa in Neulengbach was rented at first. It lies half an hour from Vienna by express train; very prettily situated, and yet nobody ever goes there.

They nestled very comfortably there. And once again, it was adorable what talents that little gypsy-girl, Doris, could display for being the lady of the house, the way in which she knew how to arrange everything in a covertly untidy manner, what dignity she exhibited. She simply had a gift for every role.

Furthermore, they were not too very much alone. For she had to keep being seen, otherwise people would have become suspicious and initiated enquiries which could easily have led to an irksome ending, probably even to the exposure of the whole swindle. So she joined in her rehearsals and purchased her shopping; even appeared at the Derby, where she could not well fail to be present, and where Poldi Kirchnegger was sorely missed. She even won a very considerable sum there, the deuced delightful minx who was lucky in everything she undertook.

When she went home after the performance, he was waiting for her, his coat-collar turned up monstrously high, always in the deepest shadow so that nobody would recognise him, as near as Hütteldorf or at the train station at least. Those were journeys spiced by a danger that was not exactly deadly but was serious all the same, short trips full of nonsensical

charm. For he was still boyishly young enough to find this game of hide-and-seek exquisite and to enjoy it to the end, and Doris had a mind for it as for any adventure. While on theatre-free days they belonged to each other wholly.

Sometimes a very safe friend came to be their guest.

Then there were intimate meals, so nice, oh so nice! Which not uncommonly turned into small feasts, enlivened by the inexhaustible good humour of Doris, by her conceits, by her flickering and invincible zest for life.

The man who was able to be present at one of these meals did not easily forget it, and he envied Poldi Kirchnegger for the stroke of genius which nobody had actually looked for from the good young man, and for the outrageous jamminess he had had, and which he enjoyed as the most natural thing in the world with the right of the possessor.

And so they passed a spring, in this hidden and forgotten corner of the Vienna Woods, surrounded by beech-trees, like to none they had spent before. It pressed forward to meet them, blossoming and joyful. Rides deep into the country, losing themselves in ravines, thundering along through beautiful cauldron valleys with the blue and solemn Alps towering up around their rim.

To little Doris, the child of the city and the theatre, everything was new, everything was a surprise. She had a heavenly ignorance of these things, and he was able to explain this to her, or show that to her, again and again. Another pleasure. For where had she passed her summers up to then? In Ischl or in other places where the natural scenery and the good

air are actually only pretexts for something else entirely. And so a good part of the holiday passed exactly as desired. And it was actually astonishing how cheaply the fun came.

Summer drew to a close, and the autumn rains began. Doris resumed her daily trips into the city, and again she brought back with her the drollest anecdotes, so full of niceties and allusions that actually only the initiated were able to appreciate them, and recounted them with all her exuberance and all her mischievousness. But Poldi listened to them with only half an ear and could no longer give them quite the credit they deserved. For he felt himself excluded from a sphere in which he had formerly liked to breathe, and taking part in it only through an intermediary could not, when all was said and done, satisfy him in the long run.

He was so close to Vienna with its thousand entertainments! And he was to have nothing at all of that, to sulk around and gaze into the sorrowful mist which crept up and swirled punctually every morning and evening!

He was thoroughly bored. And all of little Doris's arts could avail nothing against the awkward feeling of sitting on the threshold of all delights and yet being separated from them. He envied every one of his comrades; he envied the little man from Trnava – extremely inconsistent with his rank for Poldi Kirchnegger – who was continually seeing and enjoying something new (and with his money, moreover), whereas he knew little Doris inside out by this time.

She certainly played a few more scenes than others could! But they were essentially always the same, and in the process he discovered

something inside himself for which he had never supposed himself to have a disposition. He became jealous, jealous of every one of his colleagues whom she talked about, of everyone from his circle whom she had met.

The sojourn in the villa, which had, after all, been built and intended for summer, was not in itself particularly comfortable. Such arguments did not exactly make it more pleasant. The trips through the autumn mist did not agree with little Doris, she began to cough slightly, and the evenings on which she did not have to act were so endlessly long! She was not used to that, not inclined to always render account to him for her person and her conduct, and she really did not rightly understand what justification one had for demanding such explanations from her.

Very ugly scenes ensued. She absolutely could not stand them, and they were the worst way to win her back. Poldi Kirchnegger knew this well and was annoyed with himself. But he was too unrestrained to be able to control himself, and from sheer spite and bile he lost his temper time and again and got carried away.

One day, Doris had disappeared. Without a song and dance, and without any farewell. She was simply no friend of those. But Poldi Kirchnegger remained all alone and had the opportunity to perfect himself in two fine arts, in music and in mathematics: he played the blues and counted the days.

And so two great events coincided: the little man from Trnava returned from his world-tour and let everyone gape their fill at him, and Poldi Kirchnegger turned up again; and in every place where anyone took an interest in the fact, it became known that he had fallen out completely

with Doris and was determined to marry in accordance with his rank in the near future. The most noble parents felt no little delight at this and at their wise and so perfectly successful plan. There is simply nothing which forms, and wakes a slumbering character, as a journey does.

The little man from Trnava had also resumed his job. He is, because he has seen much, very well liked, and he is making progress, nice and slowly, in his bank – I almost wrote “on his bench.” He is also married, and his dining-room is fantastically decorated with memories of his world-tour and does not in the least resemble that of a junior clerk; and it sounds like the start of a fairy-tale, or like an outrageous boast, when he begins: “When I was the guest of the Maharaja of Lahore...” And it is true nevertheless – the fairy-tale of his life, about which one may presumably now speak after so many years, seeing that, in true fairy-tale fashion, it all turned out for the best for everyone.