

German Short Stories of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Josef Willomitzer (1849-1900)

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Hearts of Gold

Mother and daughter are sitting with their morning coffee. As usual, they have separated the newspaper so that each of them has a part of it to read.

On this occasion, so it seems, Mama has received a particularly amusing section of the newspaper. It must be something quite wonderful that she is reading, something pleasant, good, joyfully surprising. The powerful rising and falling of the still very handsome woman's bosom betrays a strong inner emotion. Her brown eyes sparkle merrily, the fine sides of her nose rise ... What *can* she be reading?

In the countenance of her daughter, however, all is harsh, morose,

and troubled. The newspaper cannot be the cause, for – just take a closer look: Miss Fritzi is not reading at all, she is looking over the sheet into space. She is looking over into faraway Hungary, to Szakálas, where the castle of Baron Trueheart stands on an enwooded hill, the future paradise of her friend Poldi. She also, poor Fritzi, is to finally find her “happiness” there. The happiness of not being single any more – the happiness of getting a husband! Oh, that happiness! Does it hold any kind of attraction for her now? No, no, no!

Good Fritzi’s happiness – it flew away over the sea, never to return, with a frivolous young musician a long time ago. And Fritzi could never in the least bring herself to accept that cosy philosophy of life which states that not only this or that man, but a proper man is absolutely necessary to establish a young lady’s happiness. Her happiness was dead and gone, somewhere in America. And this Mr. Brehmer, the steward of the Hungarian estates of Baron Trueheart, even if he really be the sturdy yeoman, the honest man that the Baron never tires of lauding him to be – he can offer *her* no other happiness than the happiness of providing for a maiden of thirty years of age...

Anyhow, it *must* be. Everyone says that it must be. Even Poldi’s mother, Mrs. von Stieglitz, who has been beside herself with elation ever since the young and splendid baron decided to take Poldi home with him as his wife, has made it crystal-clear to her friend’s daughter that she must marry Brehmer the Steward. “You owe it to yourself, Fritzi, and you owe it to your mother, who cannot, for Heaven’s sake, be lumbered with you for all eternity.”

And Baron Trueheart, his beautiful blue eyes go moist with emotion every time he talks about his steward, about excellent Brehmer, who saved the baron's life on a bear-hunt one day and who shall finally receive, for his deed, the finest reward from the hands of his master – no: of his friend – the fulfilment of his dearest wish – a German wife, who will make the longed-for charm of a German home burst forth for him in a foreign land. Nobody has a greater calling for this mission, maintains Trueheart, than Miss Fritzi Granner.

“For you are *genuine*, Miss Fritzi,” he habitually subjoins while pressing her hand. “I know people, and I know this: *You*, miss, are genuine.” At the same time, he always looks at her so curiously with his conquering blue eyes. But Fritzi has invariably only a mocking smile for reply. A smile in which Baron Trueheart, if he is really so very perspicacious, could read:

“Well, my dear, gracious sir, if I am so very genuine, why did you not choose *me* to wife? Poldi may well be two years younger than me; she is not prettier than me. My mirror says so and people say so. Do think it over, gracious sir! Perhaps the honourable man who snatched you away from the paws of a bear can also be sufficiently rewarded with my friend Poldi!”

Perhaps the young baron really is thinking it over. Mama at least has not abandoned hope. With a hawk's eyes, she observes every ardent hand-press, every tender look that her daughter receives from the husband-to-be of that utterly inconsequential Poldi. Only with reluctance would Mama accept her daughter moving into Szakálas as the steward's wife instead of as the lady of the castle – but she must get married in the

end, at all events, that is clearly Mama's opinion also. And can anyone blame her for it? The widow's pension, on which the two of them can barely scrape by – it will completely suffice for Mama on her own.

It must be so. And if one may believe the baron, this man of honour – his steward – is a fine figure of a man with a large, handsome beard and a gentle, childlike disposition. It must be, and it will be marvellous! enthuses above all Poldi, the baron's betrothed. They will be together as sisters in the beautiful castle... *Qui vivra verra!* [*Time will tell!*] However, my dear Poldi, if your promises are not fulfilled, if the idea should enter your head one day, in your capriciousness, not to regard me as your friend, your sister any longer, but as your subordinate, then have a care! Then the good baron will be pleased to help me to take revenge. The way he has looked at me and pressed my hand leaves no doubt of that. It is, in any case, the beginning of a novel which promises to become extremely interesting...

Absorbed in these thoughts, Miss Fritzi looks darkly over the newspaper into space. And she says to herself that Poldi, in her unexpected good fortune, has actually become truly insufferable with all of her saccharine pliancy. Objectionable, unbearable! How she always presses up to the baron and sniffs at him! Just like a fawning little dog! And how he was made to swear yesterday never again to expose himself to the dangers of a bear-hunt! Only with reluctance did he condescend to make that promise. A feeling of satiety with your soppy sweet nothings cannot fail to arise; you can be sure of that, dear Poldi!

That is what the daughter is cogitating and contriving while Mama

finishes her perusal with a groan of delight. Her countenance beaming, the good lady exclaims:

“Wonderful! Wonderful!... This shows you: there is still a God in Heaven! I certainly do not wish any harm upon anyone, but this arrogance had to be punished. That Stieglitz woman wanted to send you to Hungary as the wife of the estate-manager, as her daughter’s subordinate. And you – I’ve never been able to understand it – instead of thanking but no thanking the snooty so-and-so for the great honour and favour, bow like a good girl to the impertinent demand. Well, now they have it! There’s still a God in Heaven! Read this: ‘Con-man Exposed! The so-called Baron von Trueheart was arrested in a hotel yesterday evening. He is in reality a tailor’s journeyman from Temesvar. He has perpetrated enormous swindles’ – orders for his estates which actually lie not in Hungary but on the moon! Here, read it! The report is three columns long.”

And Miss Fritzi pounces on the newspaper. And while she reads, the heavy weight is lifted from her heart. Tears pour down her cheeks – merrily rolling tears of joy...

Now Mama also begins to cry. And through the veil of tears, they both now see someone who has entered unannounced.

Poldi!

Trembling aghast, she rushes to Fritzi. “You know?... And you’re crying?... You’re crying for me?... Oh, how good you are!... He always said: You are genuine!... He...”

There she stops and pushes the hair back from her forehead.

“Pull yourself together, poor child!” says Mrs. Granner. And looking

tenderly at her daughter, she adds: “Yes, Fritzi is exactly like me! She knows no envy. She knows no schadenfreude. She has a heart of gold!”

But Poldi wraps her arms around her sobbing friend and whispers:

“Oh, Fritzi... and you don’t even know the worst of it yet!”

Mama’s keen ears heard that, and her sharp mind has already guessed what “the worst of it” is. And they both burst out into even more copious tears – the old and the young hearts of gold!

Schopenhauer Converted

Dr. Fiedler, a young lawyer in the royal capital, received the following singular letter one day:

“My dear old friend! Be so good as to have writing cards printed at the double with the name: Dr. Arthur Schopenhauer. I am not at all insane, but I did marry a charming creature last year who has at her disposal not only a high-yielding rich uncle but also a truly delightful ignorance and naivety, as well as other feminine virtues. Now we lead a splendid life on our pretty little country estate, but sometimes we get a little bored, and as I recently read in the newspaper that you will be staging a play in Iglau sometime soon, so I infer that you also are bored and are not excessively burdened by clients. But to the point! Of late, I have been in the habit of teasing my wife by reading out to her all kinds of offensive passages from Schopenhauer’s works. This has put her into a very comical passion, particularly the day before yesterday, when I communicated to her the grouchy, misogynistic philosopher’s assertion that women should not be called the “fair” but the “unaesthetic” sex. Now today, I search everywhere

for my beloved Schopenhauer. Nowhere to be found. I ask my wife. 'I burned him,' she replies with the utmost cold-bloodedness. Without doubt, this dastardly deed cries to Heaven for vengeance, and you shall be the instrument of my revenge.

"To wit: I have succeeded in hoodwinking my wife into believing that Schopenhauer is still alive and I am on a friendly footing with him. Now I ask you – will it not be a *jocus* fit for the gods if you turn up at our place next Sunday as Dr. Arthur Schopenhauer? Without doubt, my beloved Hermine will come out breathing fire at you at first, but you always were an Admirable Crichton, you know, and you will surely do a stellar job. So kindly imagine that the *World as Will and Representation* was composed by you, and use this as subject matter for a comedy that is sure to have the people of Iglau splitting their sides with laughter. In any case, gladden your old friend Götz with a sign of life as soon as you can."

On the following day, a letter that was no less strange was received by the gentleman of leisure and householder in the Ringstraße [*Ring Road*], Peter Steinreich [*Filthy-Rich*]. "Dearest Uncle," Mrs. Hermine Götz wrote to him, "forgive me for calling on your aid today in a truly comical matter. Götz and I, this must be said in advance, live together very happily. His being very boyish and liking boorish jokes, you surely know all about, but what vexes me the most is the quite incredible way in which he underestimates me. Just think: He would in all seriousness, for example, have me believe that Schopenhauer is still alive and is one of his best friends. Today he showed me the following telegram: 'Dear Götz! Intend to spend next Sunday with you in euphoric affirmation of existence. I come

with the midday train. Your Arthur Schopenhauer.' This is evidently the prelude to an ungentle comedy he has staged with some one of his duelling fraternity brothers. So I'd be very glad if you could induce Götz, using any pretext you like, to go to you in Vienna with the early train on Sunday. You see, I trust that I shall manage that interesting Mr. Schopenhauer very well in the absence of my slightly unrefined lord and master; and it will, perhaps, greatly promote the pedagogical mission that I have to carry out on my otherwise quite excellent husband if you, dear Uncle, would be so kind as to come to my aid in the manner indicated through a dispatch that arrived around Sunday morning."

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"Oh!" the pretty little dissembler cried to the arrival, in splendidly feigned pleasant surprise, reading the card once again – "Dr. Arthur Schopenhauer" – before surveying the young man's appearance with evidently the most genial interest. "How completely differently I had pictured you in my mind, Doctor! In my conception, you were a gaunt, grim old man with busy eyebrows and furrowed countenance... My husband was looking forward to your visit... but just think: this morning, there came this dispatch..."

She handed the telegram to him. "Dear Götz, come here at once. I need your advice regarding dispositions of last will and testament. Uncle Peter."

"Nevertheless," the young wife added, "I shall sincerely appreciate it if you could devote to me the afternoon you had intended for my husband... Oh, do not trouble yourself with civilities; I do of course know

that you are fundamentally opposed to women, but I shall endeavour” – she said this with the most charmingly roguish smile – “to make the afternoon as pleasant as possible for you.”

Indeed, even if he had been the real flesh-and-blood Schopenhauer, he would have had to lay down his arms as early as the midday-meal, so enchantingly did the young wife’s amiability envelop him. He learned from her chat that she had not burned her husband’s Schopenhauer at all, but had only hidden him, to return him intact to her lord and master as a nameday present in the next few days.

“Do you know, dear Mr. Schopenhauer, which of all your sayings is the most apropos? I have noted it down for myself here in this little book: ‘A perfectly truthful, unduplicitous woman is perhaps impossible. For this very reason, they see through dissimulation in others so easily that it is not advisable to attempt it with them.’¹ This appears in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Volume 2, Page 652, and I must say that this observation reveals an admirable perspicacity.”

“You are much too kind,” the surrogate Schopenhauer stammered, blushing; the graceful chattiness of his hostess had not given him the slightest opportunity to make a trial at being an Admirable Crichton.

“Now I shall take you up to Wolfram’s Cave,” she said after table. “It is two solitary chambers of rock which once served an old hermit as his abode. Nothing now remains inside other than a large moss-grown seat, but we shall enjoy a delightful cerebral phenomenon there.”

¹ From his essay ‘Über die Weiber’ [‘On Women’] of 1851.

“A cerebral phenomenon?”

“Assuredly, dear Schopenhauer. Just be so kind as to remember what you” – once more she took out the notebook – “say right at the beginning of the second volume of *World as Will and Representation*: ‘A beautiful view is a cerebral phenomenon.’”

“Oh yes, quite right. I no longer remembered that remark...”

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Sweet sounds passed softly through his soul in spite of the steepness of the climb up the wooded hill. In front, Mrs. Hermine skipped in a light summer dress, beside her Hector, her large black dog, and behind her Doctor Fiedler with the sentiments of the hero in a novel.

The view from the moss-grown seat through the large window that had been hewn out of the rock in secluded Wolfram’s Cave was truly magnificent. They were sitting next to one another, but whenever he made an attempt to snuggle up against her just a little, the dog began to growl. “For Heaven’s sake, do not touch me,” said Mrs. Hermine, “Hector is terribly jealous. Only the other day, when my cousin Fritz embraced me in jest, he tore a lump of flesh out of his thigh that Shylock could have been content with!”

“How delightfully this enchanting woman knows how to bring her little knowledge to market,” the fake Schopenhauer said to himself, and he lost himself in deep reflection, from which Mrs. Hermine laughingly roused him with the question: “What ingenious wickedness may you be brooding over now?” He sighed: “Oh, I am thinking of a poem by Schiller, and wishing it might come true here.” “And what poem is that?” she asked.

“Hector’s Farewell,” he replied most wistfully.

Her silver laughter rang out into the distance. “I thought,” she cried, “you were very fond of dogs.” “On the contrary, I am staunchly anti-dog.” Now she took her little book out again. “Why, dear Schopenhauer, do you not yourself recommend dogs, in the second volume of the *Parerga*, Page 96, in view of their moral and intellectual capabilities, as the companions of solitude? And do you not write literally the same thing on Page 215? ‘However could one recover from the dissimulation, falseness, and insidiousness of human beings, were there no dogs into whose honest faces one can look without mistrust?’”

“I swear to you, gracious lady,” cried Fiedler, “that I have no idea of all the things I have scribbled down, and that I am ready to recant everything with pleasure, if you so wish!”

“Very well,” said Mrs. Hermine, “I take you at your word. But that significant act shall not be executed here, but formally at home with a bottle of Heidsieck...” “And without Hector,” added Fiedler. “Yes!” Mrs. Hermine happily agreed, “without Hector!” ...

When the bottle was uncorked, he fell at her feet and cried, “I adore you!” “Oh!” she replied, laughing, “have you then completely forgotten what you” – she leafed through the little book – “say on p. 656 of the second volume of the *Parerga*: ‘Showing reverence to women is ridiculous beyond measure and lowers us in their own eyes... Our fatuous veneration of women is the peak of Christo-Germanic stupidity, which has only served to make them so arrogant and inconsiderate...’”

“Stop!” he interrupted. “When I wrote that passage, I was in a state

of miserable hangover; it was the morning after the final drinking-party to celebrate the General German Philosophers' Day!" "Well then!" said Mrs. Hermine, "here you have pen and paper, write!"

And she dictated: "Dearest Hermine! The blissful moments I have spent with you..." "Have spent?" he interjected. "Have spent," she repeated. Then he: "The future tense appears to me to be more appropriate in this sentence." She however: "No, we must content ourselves with the perfect tense, for the coach to the railway station is waiting for you now. Very well: The blissful moments I have spent with you have brought to my awareness, as if by magic, the utter invalidity of my world-view. Queen, life is beautiful after all, and it is not the dog, as may be inferred from some passages in my writings, who is the Crown of Creation, but the Crown of Creation is Woman. Arthur Schopenhauer."

The servant announced the coach; Mrs. Hermine received Schopenhauer's written recantation and gave the guest her hand in parting. At the door, he turned around once more. "Forgive me, gracious lady, I have deceived you!"

"Not at all!" Frau Hermine laughed. But he: "Indeed, for my real name..." She interrupted him. "Oh please, do not betray the sweet secret that you are called Müller or Schulze, and trust my assurance that I did not for a single moment believe you to be Arthur Schopenhauer!"

Two hours later, Hermine's husband returned from Vienna in a very surly temper. "Your uncle is healthy and vigorous, he just felt like playing a jape. We sat in the Stephanskeller the whole day long. And how was the visit? Why won't you look at me? Why, you're quite flustered!"

“Just think,” Hermine stammered with lowered gaze, “I have succeeded in inducing your friend Schopenhauer to recant all of his works. He changed his entire world-view on the moss-grown seat in Wolfram’s Cave.”

“What?” yelled Götz. “You were in Wolfram’s Cave with him?” Mrs. Hermine turned away, and from the back it looked as if she were about to start sobbing. “And just think,” she lisped, “on parting, he gave me a souvenir in his own hand. There it is.”

Götz took the sheet and read with mounting horror: “The blissful moments I have spent with you...” He threw the sheet down and roared, “Unhappy woman, it *wasn’t* the real Schopenhauer!”

With an expression of pained astonishment, the young wife replied, “It wasn’t? Oh, what a shame.”

The Epithalamium

Once upon a time there was a goitre which had a princess, because it was far too big for one to say that the princess had *it*. Now it came to pass that the courtiers, after a long search, had finally found, in a faraway land, a hump that had a prince. Dispatches flew back and forth; Bertram, as the prince was called, telegraphed Princess Edeltrud: “Je vous aime!”, the princess immediately gave him her telegraphic Oui-word, and great rejoicing broke out all over the kingdom, for people had well-nigh abandoned hope that the search for a husband of equal birth for the princess would be successful.

Only one person was sad among the general blissful delirium, and

that one was Mr. Brimstone, the Privy Actual Court Poet. Before this gladdening event, the approach of which the heart of every subject hailed, Brimstone had had nothing to do year in, year out other than think up noble passages from the life of the king and publish them in the official gazette. All subjects were deeply moved whenever the newspaper was able to report a new noble deed done incognito by the king.

In reality, however, the king did absolutely no deeds, neither bad ones nor good ones, for day after day he had quite enough to do smoking his giant meerschaum pipe. And what a meerschaum! It showed a wonderful likeness of the king's head, and two allegorical figures crowned this head: Goodness and Wisdom. The nose, chin and cheeks of the head were quite brown by now, likewise the legs of Goodness and Wisdom, but the whole group was to become much, much browner. Now whenever a new report in the newspaper was read out to the king about his magnanimity which supposedly worked in secret, he would listen with particular pleasure and invariably cry: "Bravo, Brimstone!"

Now, however, the arrival of Prince Bertram was on the immediate horizon, and the seneschal gave Mr. Brimstone the flattering commission of writing an epithalamium, as ingenious as might be and as tasteful as might be, for the hump and for the goitre. "The prickliness of the subject matter," His Excellency affably added, "will task your full poetic power, but your talent will ascend the heights of the given commission and justify the expectations one holds of you. It is needless to emphasise that your poem must not be some empty verbal jingle-jangle, but will have to treat the personal excellences of the noble couple affectionately and in depth!"

“But” – so stammered the Court Poet, receiving this instruction with shaking knees – “but may it please Your Excellency to consider that I know nothing more about both noble personages than...”

While he choked down mention of the princess’s neck and her intended’s back with a pitiful expression, the seneschal cut the discussion short with the words: “Eh bien, mon cher!” [*Well, my dear fellow!*] and dismissed him with a gracious sweep of the hand.

So there was certainly reason enough for poor Brimstone to be sad in the midst of the general rapture. He stayed awake throughout the night and composed to hard that the sweat was dripping off him, and yet by quarter to eight in the morning he had not managed to write anything more than this single couplet:

Thou noble heart in proudly-domèd house,
Whom Edeltrud has chosen for her spouse...

A weak ray of hope that the rest might occur to him in the bosom of nature induced him to wander out into the green forest. Gloomily he crept through the transported city; the dogs merrily jumped up at each other, the horses drawing the tram neighed happily, and all the people rubbed their hands and said, “What good fortune!” Only the pitiable Court Poet was crestfallen, and he murmured again, and ever again:

“Thou noble heart in proudly-domèd house...”

Outdoors, in the bosom of nature, a bird sat on a tree and cried: “Peeu, peeu!” It was a very beautiful bird with a brilliant black head and red breast, and the Court Poet, who beheld this wonder-bird in the green forest, never having seen a bullfinch in all his born days, did not know that

he – the bird – was one. Peeu, peeu! the bird called luringly, and it fluttered from one tree to the other. Mr. Brimstone hurried after it, but the bird flew ever further, luring the poet, who forgot his song and his sorrow thereby, ever deeper into the wood. In this way did he roam around, all over the wilderness, for three days; he stayed overnight with a hermit or with charcoal-burners, and early each morning the beautiful wonder-bird was sitting in a tree and would lure the wanderer to continue his journey with a loud Peeu, peeu!

Suddenly, Brimstone saw a weeny, yucky, puffy, wobbly, warty creature at his feet, the like of which he had never seen before, since there are no toads in the city. So he let the bird be and hurried after the hopping toad. The path led into a wild, dark, humid ravine; precipitous rock-faces towered up, marvellous toadstools shimmered all around, high ferns surrounded a hollow, and in this a huntsman sat stroking his Van Dyke beard.

Now the poet let the toad be and walked up to the hunter.

“Why, you’re most welcome! Whence and wherefrom?” cried the huntsman with a friendly laugh. But the poet said, “Alas, that you must remind me of that!” – And he told the stranger his trouble.

“What an incredible coincidence!” laughed the hunter. “Just listen to this: when we heard the news of the betrothal of Prince Bertram to Princess Edeltrud, there was no end to our rejoicing back home, and my dear grandmother, who loves the art of poetry above all else, speedily wrote an epithalamium for this splendid occasion. Now it is to appear in the newspaper, but nobody must, under any circumstances, come to know

about the origin of the poem, or my dear grandmama would die of shame, for the fair wreath of her virtues does not lack the flower of modesty.”

While saying this, he pulled a sheet of paper from his breast-pocket and handed it to the poet. He read and read, and when he had read to the end, he broke out into tumultuous applause that lasted several minutes.

For the poem truly was wondrously fine. There was verve and euphony of language, and its sage content was in perfect concord with its noble form. The blemishes of the noble couple were referred to with amiable tact, the hump and the goitre could virtually be visualised in poetic transfiguration, and, with touching truth, expression was given to how the populations of the two kingdoms had been most intimately united through the delicate rose-chains of this bond, and how even the poor people in the most wretched huts, although they had nothing to eat, had felt a real thrill of joy run through their bodies in the face of this exhilarating event.

“Listen to me, my dear man” – said the Court Poet – “if your gracious Grandmother would be so kind as to let me possess this poem as my absolute intellectual property, you should have a hundred thalers for it!”

The hunter began to roar with laughter, and he cried: “A fine reception my grandmother would give you for that! She sings like the bird doth sing, that lives in the green sward; the song she to the feast doth bring is its own rich reward!² No, Sir, the song is not to be had for a hundred thalers, nor for a thousand, nor for a hundred thousand, but it is for sale for a trifle, for a real bagatelle, to wit, your so-called soul!”

² A parody of lines in the ballad ‘Der Sanger’ [‘The Minstrel’] which appears in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* [*Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*] (1795-96).

“Well!” said the poet, “so that means you would actually be... the Evil Principle.”

“Don’t feel you have to be polite,” the hunter cut in. “Just say straight out: the Devil, for I am he and none other!”

The poet overcame the horror that had seized him, for he said to himself that he must have this extraordinarily successful epithalamium at any cost, because for him the most important thing – his honour – was at stake.

“Very well, you are the Devil,” he said in a choked voice. “This pleases me uncommonly; I have heard much that is pleasant about you, and I do not have the slightest objection in principle to entering into friendly relations with you. Only, you will comprehend that I cannot possibly expose myself to the danger of being fetched by you out of the blue one day.”

With a smile the Devil replied: “The tremendous upswing in my enterprise permits me to accommodate my honoured customers with the most favourable conditions. I shall readily consent to a clause, if my offer be otherwise agreeable to you, to the effect that I shall not seize possession of you until I have been authorised thereto by an especial invitation from you, be it in spoken or written form.”

Our friend was well content with this, and after he had signed the contract, which was entirely to that effect, he took the epithalamium, let the Devil be, and cheerfully followed the toad, which conducted him out of the ravine, as well as the bullfinch, which awaited him, and without whose guidance he would hardly have found the way back through the large wild wood.

When he entered the city, the dogs were walking past the houses with their tails between their legs. Sorrowful and weary were the horses of the tram; a great feeling of oppressiveness seemed to lie on every heart. But the Court Poet noticed none of this; filled with proud joy, he strode along and revelled in the anticipation of his great success.

Then his best friend, the king's valet, ran towards him, looking distraught, and cried: "Quel malheur!" [*What misfortune!*] And he told the poet, in hasty confusion, that on top of the disaster that had taken place, the king's wonderfully fine meerschaum had fallen from his mouth and smashed to pieces when he heard the news of the shattering occurrence.

To be precise, the following had taken place: The prince had arrived the day before, and when the noble couple came visage to visage, things were... different from what they had envisaged. To wit, they had both supposed that the irregularity in the other's appearance was of a quite everyday kind that would easily be borne after a quick habituation. However, when the princess saw the prince, she exclaimed, "Fi donc!" [*Oh fie!*] and turned her back on him. And the prince did likewise at the same moment with the cry, "Jamais!" [*Never!*] Then he drove back at the double through the Triumphal Gates to the station, took a special train, and steamed away.

When the Court Poet had heard this melancholy report, he went cherry-red, his eyes bulged, he stood there gnashing his teeth, his fists clenched, and at last the words escaped his lips:

"*Devil* take me!"

No sooner had he said this than... Krrrr... tschin.... Tarattatta...

fitsch... futsch! –

The valet opened his mouth wide in horror, for his friend had disappeared without a trace. Nothing remained but a dreadful stink. The three Court Docs were speedily called in; they sniffed around in the air with their long noses, put their heads together, and held a consultation in the Latin tongue, because whenever something is all Greek to doctors, they begin to talk Latin. At last, the three doctors declared in unison that the pitiable man was beyond help, he had evidently been shredded to atoms by the explosion of fireworks he had perhaps brought with him in his pocket for the celebration. But just for once, the three Court Docs were mistaken: the Court Poet had been fetched by the Devil.

“Far too soon!” averred the official gazette in a deeply-moved obituary it devoted to its unforgettable colleague.

The Black Fish

The King had slept splendidly all night long, and when he got out of his four-poster bed in the morning, he had not the slightest suspicion that a terrible crime had been committed against him that very night: he had been insulted!

At midnight, to be precise, the following had taken place in the upper inn of the village of Katzenberg near Dreilingen. Matz, the young farmer from Brünnhof Farm, and several other village residents had got into a discussion of the external and internal political situation that was as comprehensive as it was thorough. Matz was the one sounding off most vehemently. Nobody has ever been able to ascertain how many glasses

preceded it – no matter – the Brünnhof Farmer banged his large fist on the table and, in a thundering voice, committed the crime of insulting the king. Several factors speak against his having been quite sober at the time. Seldom does a man who can name a rosy young wife his own and who is not ill-provided for in other respects, seldom does such a man yearn to go from a state of freedom to prison. And even if he should, at one time, feel the urge to say something remarkably stupid, which forms the subject of a severe section in the statute books – even then he will, in a sober state, master so sinister an urge when the enemy is sitting, listening maliciously, at the next table.

The enemy at the next table was Toni Tobinger, who had clashed with the Brünnhof Farmer a year before. Over a trifle, one can safely say. Rich Matz had just married beautiful Wawi; poor Tobinger was left with nothing but the memory of a sweet hour in the hay.

“Cross-me-heart-an’-hope-to, she’s become proud, our Wawer!” Tobinger said to Matz one day.

“She’s not *our* – she’s *mine*,” came the brusque reply.

Then the other said, laughing, “Long before she was yours, she was mine. And it was fabulous in the hay that day, cross-me-heart-an’-hope-to.”

And Matz gave Toni such a blow to the bonce with a beer-glass that the bashed man heard the angels singing in Heaven (music from ‘Cavalleria rusticana,’ no doubt.)

On the day after that blow to the bonce, Tobinger strode over Klosterplatz Square in Dreilingen – straight towards the court- and prison-house, to sue Matz for affronting his honour. It was, you see, only his

delicate sense of honour and not his thick skull that had been wounded by the blow. But he came to a halt before the four house-steps and reflected awhile. What could the court give Matz? Probably a fine, which Matz would shell out with pleasure. No, no! Let's bide our time. Perhaps we'll land him in a pickle that's worth a bit more than a fine. – So Toni turned back and let the blow to the bonce be for the present.

For the present! But then, when Matz blurted out his uncouth insult to the King, his enemy at the next table chuckled contentedly to himself. "Cross-me-heart-an'-hope-to, you're mine!" laughed Tobinger.

And the next afternoon, Tobinger once again walked over the Klosterplatz straight for the penitentiary, which adjoined the monastery church perpendicularly on the right-hand side. This time it'll be worthwhile, this time it wasn't Anton Tobinger, this time it was the King who was insulted. Cross-me-heart-an'-hope-to!

It was a sullen grey day. Here and there a pale face could be seen behind one of the barred windows of the house. On the long fire-ladders which were provided, placed horizontally under a canopy of the courthouse, the wild "Peter's lads," the sons of the jailer, were doing exercises. An old, skin-and-bones churchy woman was kneeling on the step before the "Mount of Olives." That was a gloomy cell on the exterior of the church. In a wide hemicycle, a door with a wire-mesh window protected this quiet shrine.

The wild boys under the ladders had gone together by the ears. Their father, Peter the jailer, a tall, hasty man, appeared on the steps before the courthouse door and angrily threw a large bunch of keys into

the knot of brawling boys. Then he turned on Tobinger, who greeted him humbly and was about to come up the steps. He must show his “summons.” Without a document, nobody might enter. Anyone could come and desire admission to the prison.

Tobinger answered timidly that he himself had no wish whatsoever to stay inside, he rather only wanted to report someone who was guilty of insulting the King. The pack of boys had scattered in the meantime; Peter fetched his bunch of keys while dropping a few curses and then turned to Tobinger, a little more graciously: “That’s very nice of you, but you must report it to the Public Prosecutor’s Office over there.” He pointed to one of the houses which flanked the square opposite the church, took out his pocket-watch and said, “You’ll have to wait a quarter of an hour, the office opens at three.”

“Yes, yes,” Tobinger said and then beat a retreat. He stopped at the “Mount of Olives.” That was a good opportunity for several Our Fathers. Piety is the best way of passing the time. He knelt down beside the old woman, pressed his nose against the wire-mesh window, and became absorbed in the sight of the life-sized, brightly-painted wooden figures.

There, engirded with clouds, God the Father with the white forehead-curl. Over him floated the Holy Ghost. Underneath, a red glass lamp. In the middle of the grotto, the Saviour on his knees. His countenance and folded hands appeared thickly covered with drops of blood, as it is written in Luke 22:44, “And his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” On the other side, the sleeping disciples. Tobinger had the feeling that God the Father’s countenance was

greeting him in wrath, and that these words rang out from the grotto: “Now Judas is here too! Judas is *you!*”

Tobinger’s thoughts wandered, while his lips prayed, far away from the well-beaten Our-Father-path. Is it an Act of Judas when one reveals a crime? Had the man with the bunch of keys not praised his intention? And yet – why was he doing it? From righteous indignation, or – from a malicious hankering to plunge a fellow-man into misfortune? And Wawi will plunge with him...

He pressed his nose against the wire-mesh ever more firmly, and an unholy image came to life before his eyes: The secret happiness in the hay! Long, long he knelt there and dreamt, while his lips prayed...

Then he rose to his feet, wiped the dust from his knees and went. But not to the house that the jailer had indicated to him. He was going homewards. A shrill whistle from the prison made him swing sharply round. Tall Peter was standing there, whistling and signalling and jangling his bunch of keys. Tobinger slowly followed the vehement signs.

“Onwards,” shouted the jailer, “the Public Prosecutor is there now!”

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The Brünnhof Farmer was behind bars. No reproach could fall upon Dr. Rosenfarb; the excellent lawyer had summoned up all his powers, done all that was humanely possible to extricate the accused. In vain! The witnesses would also have liked to help Matz, but the feeling of friendship does not so easily prevail over the oath to withhold nothing and say everything, or over the fear of the punishment for perjury.

Tobinger, avoided by everyone, left the place; only his old mother

remained in her cottage at the end of the village. He took service as a farmhand in Schöblersgrün, and when he visited his mother, he avoided people and – crossing the high-road – took the way around the village.

One November evening, he was once again walking back to Schöblersgrün across the fields. Now he was passing along a stretch of high-road to turn off on the other side at the next field-way. He was thinking about the Brünnhof Farmer, who had been shut up in prison for four weeks and was to stay shut up there for nine times longer yet, because Dr. Rosenfarb's last attempt, a plea for clemency, had also been unsuccessful. And he was thinking of the Brünnhof Farmer's wife, who was now a young mother. So until her Matz had finished his time inside, she could divert herself with the tiny little Brünnhof Farmer.

Tobinger walked on, cross-me-heart-an'-hope-to, what was that over there? Nothing. Nothing at all. Tobinger began to sing, although his heart wasn't really in it. Then he heard his name being called. And there was nobody in sight. The call came from above, out of the air.

But then a figure detached itself from the dark branches of a leafless chestnut tree and bent down.

"Jesus, it's Matz!" fell from the lips of horrified Tobinger. He tried to flee but was rooted to the spot. The figure climbed slowly down and walked right up to trembling Tobinger. Good Heavens, it really was Matz! Only different in his being – stiff and solemn...

"I'm supposed to be Matz?" said Matz, calmly. "Whatever are you thinking of, pal? Matz is in prison now. You must know that, mustn't you – after all, you yourself helped put him in there."

Tobinger's mouth wobbled, he could bring out only a groan. And Matz continued, "Yes, pal, Matz is in a pretty pickle. But I pity you even more. And do you know why I pity you? Because at Christmas, you won't get to eat any black fish with noodles."

Tobinger forced himself to laugh in his anguish. Clearly a jocular ghost, whose merry mood one should not spoil.

"Hehehe... And why ... why should I not get any black fish with noodles this Christmas?"

And Matz looked him sadly in the eye and answered, "Because freshly laid bodies in freshly dug graves don't eat black fish with noodles!"

Tobinger thought he was going to keel over. The apparition signalled him to go away. Tobinger staggered along the field-way and fell into the roadside-ditch. And he picked himself up and kept running...

He ran around all night long, throwing himself down time and time again and tearing out his hair. It's all up with him! Barely four weeks has he left to live, for in the joyful, wonderful, mercy-bringing Christmastide³ he will lie as a freshly laid corpse in a freshly dug grave...

But the morning sun brought him a gleam of hope after this harrowing night. "Escape" – indeed, he could have got away, the Brünnhof Farmer. Impetuous as he was, he could have been driven to flight from the prison by longing for his wife and the little son who had been born to him in the meantime. If that was the case, then the ghost in the tree was no

³ A reference to the popular German song, "O du fröhliche, o du selige, Gnadenbringende Weihnachtszeit," written by Johannes Daniel Falk (1768-1826) in 1815 or 1816 and made specific to Christmas by Heinrich Holzschuher (1798-1847) in 1826.

ghost, but Matz, and then the announcement of his death was nothing more than nonsense and malice...

“Maryandjoseph!” cried old Rosel – catching him up – who was returning to Schöblersgrün with the market-basket. “Unhappy man, where were you last night? You look like misery on legs!” While he spoke, he struck his hands together time after time.

“Yes, I feel right feeble, Rosel... Just tell my cousin that I must stay away today, I’ll go to Dreilingen and get some drops of life... or to Merciful Mary the Mother of God... or to the doctor in Zwiesling...”

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He went to Dreilingen – not, however, to the apothecary’s, but over the Klosterplatz. In the doorway of the penitentiary Tall Peter yelled at him, “Show your summons!”

“I beg, I only wanted to ask if Matthias Pflöckner is still here, the Brünnhof Farmer from Katzenberg.”

“Yes, by all the dancing devils in Hell, of course he’s still here, where else is he going to be?”

“No offence! I only thought he might have just happened to escape last night.”

Tall Peter gave the poor man a terrible, piercing look and shouted, “Nobody just happens to escape from here, understood?”

“I beg forgiveness, then it was just a mistake. You see, last evening I saw someone who was a bit similar to him. He was sitting up a tree by the road and...”

“And you were drunk!” yelled the jailer, as mad as a hornet. “I’ll tell

you something,” he added forcefully, “you have the choice now: either you push off this very instant and never speak such an out-and-out inanity again as long as you draw breath – or you can stay here in detention awaiting trial for insulting the royal authorities. Then you’ll soon learn if a royal prison is a dove-cot from which the prisoners can fly out as they please and alight in trees.”

Tobinger gave a deep bow and departed with tottering steps. That was the final sentence of death, to be carried out by Christmas. It was now as clear as day that there would be no more black Christmas-fish with noodles for him. He staggered to the Mount of Olives, fell to his knees, and stared into the holy grotto. Now he felt in the depths of his heart how the God become Man inside felt in the anxious anticipation of the approaching terrors of death. It was not Tobinger’s lips that prayed now, it was his heart that prayed. You Heavenly Father there in the clouds, you Gracious Saviour who fearfully implores that this cup will pass from Him, and you Holy Ghost, you all know that Toni Tobinger would not have betrayed the Brünnhof Farmer if the jailer’s whistle had not called him back...

Hour after hour passed away, evening twilight effaced the colours of life, and still Tobinger knelt before the Mount of Olives. Then he gave a start. A hand had been gently laid on his shoulder. A small, sturdy man in a monk’s habit spoke friendly words to him and invited him to come along. He led him to the main entrance of the monastery church, and they entered the cloister. “I am Brother Joseph, the cook and gardener of this monastery,” said the little man. “You have a weight on your heart, and even though I am only a lay-brother and cannot hear your confession, yet I

would still like to know what is depressing you so sorely.”

He took him into a small, dimly-lit chamber on the ground floor and invited him to be seated. Then he brought plates, knives and forks and a meal, and set down a half-full glass of red wine. The guest greedily grabbed it, but strange – the wine flowed only to the rim of the glass, and not between the thirsting lips. The Brother laughed with joy at his guest’s nonplussed countenance. “You see, that is the tempting worldly pleasure that we in the monastery must deny ourselves.”

But he soon confessed that there was another wine available there which certainly could be drunk. To put it to the test, he brought an empty glass and a full bottle, and indeed: it was a highly palatable wine. And while the poor rogue regaled himself, the Brother did not cease insisting that the contrite man confide to him what was weighing upon his mind, be it a trespass, be it a trouble. “Our Guardian⁴ may be able to help you. Our threads extend over the whole globe. If you want something from the Emperor of China, if you want something in Rome – just speak up. It might be possible to help you.”

Tobinger resisted a long time. For didn’t he know that even the Emperor of China could not help him to get the black fish he had forfeited? Finally, however, the friendly encouragement and the noble wine opened his heart. He began to relate the idyll in the hay, which was the beginning of all misfortune. The Brother interposed no end of eager questions. How old had Wawi been then, and what had she been like? Fifteen years,

⁴ The superior in a Franciscan monastery.

blonde and fresh and full and rosy. The course of events had to be described in the tiniest detail. And when he had learned all the particulars, he leisurely took a pinch of snuff from his box, held it out to Tobinger, and said: "Well now, my friend, if it's nothing more than that, then be of good courage. We don't need to go to Rome and the Pope for this matter."

"Yes, if it were only that!" sighed Tobinger. And now he told the rest. How he received the blow to his head and subsequently avenged himself on the Brünnhof Farmer. But when he would have spoken about the ghost in the tree, the good Brother interrupted him: "As for the ghost, we'll just leave him sitting up the tree. It's with ghosts as it is with the wine-glass which you couldn't drink out of. The glass is double-layered and the wine is in between the two. It looks like magic but is only deception. Ghosts must stay out of this, they would only make our Guardian distrustful. Everything else, you may tell him tomorrow. I am, as I said, only a poor lay-brother and don't know if it's a sin that you have divulged your enemy's crime. Not every sin is a mean trick, not every mean trick is a sin. Anyhow, our threads also reach to the Queen's Father Confessor, and if you reveal the main thing to our Guardian, that you deeply rue having brought your rival into misfortune in your blind vindictiveness, then he may have help and advice for you and for him."

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Over the side gatehouse of the church, where it adjoins the prison, a wooden saint stands on the little roof with outstretched arms.

A year before the ghost sat up the tree by the road, people were standing in that corner of the square early one morning and staring in

wonder at a large hole that had come into being overnight in the prison façade above the just-mentioned little roof. They further stared in wonder at what was hanging down from the outstretched arms of the saint's statue: pieces of a cut-up sheet which had been knotted together for a rope. The Gentlemen of the Court were there already and had ascertained that Baron Scharfenegg had escaped from the prison in the course of the night. Actually, this so-called baron was a rascal without pedigree, and although the Gentlemen of the Court might justifiably have been happy to be presently relieved of the lengthy paperwork that had ensued from the swindles of this inveterate con-man, yet they knitted their brows and put their heads together and threw sharp glances every now and then at Tall Peter, who was darting around in the utmost agitation.

The Court President, normally a very mild old gentleman, took Peter to one side and said gravely: "I fear you will break your neck in the end, my dear Peter. We have all been turning a blind eye to what has been smuggled in here in the way of wine, beer, roasts, and cakes for long enough. None of us wants to take it upon himself to deprive a father of twelve children of his daily bread. But do not presume on your twelve children too much, my dear Peter. If you did not actually help this Scharfenegg to get out, we will have incredible dereliction of duty at the least."

The jailer swore by all the saints, but the old gentleman did not let him finish swearing and impressed on the father of twelve children once more that he must take the matter to heart.

This serious discussion came to the jailer's mind when, a year later,

his new and splendid customer, the Brünnhof Farmer, approached him with far too unreasonable a request. A man is *never* satisfied and always has all kinds of further wishes, even when he has it good. And Matz had it very good in the prison. He was allowed to eat and drink whatever his heart desired, and Peter was even so amiable as to help the dearly esteemed man, who had been commended into his care, with that. A golden age also seemed to have dawned for the twelve children. But when news came of his wife's delivery and the tiny little Brünnhof Farmer, Matz lost all joy in his luxurious prison life. Indeed, he even began to rage and to storm: "I must see my wife and my child!" Then he began to press Tall Peter with temptations. A handsome sum of money would be neither here nor there, if he could release him, the Brünnhof Farmer, quietly and secretly for one night, only the once. As uncouth as Peter could be on the outside, so soft could he be inside, particularly when faced with a substantial sum of money. But, as has been stated, that earnest rebuke from the President after Scharfenegg's flight came to Peter's mind.

"I'll tell you something," he said, finally relenting, "if I really do it, because I, as a father, can appreciate your longing, and if you do anything reckless, even the slightest thing, and the matter comes out, or if you go over your leave, even only by five minutes, and I'm a lost man, then mark this – then I'll hang my twelve children and myself as well. My word of honour!"

When the prisoner's outing had been set in motion with the utmost caution and Matz, on the road, recognised his enemy in the singing man coming towards him, the Brünnhof Farmer's first thought was to knock

Tobinger down and throttle him, for he felt himself strong enough to do it. In good time it occurred to him that this would be no single homicide but, so to speak, a mass murder, for the jailer had pledged him his word of honour to kill himself together with his twelve children should the adventure have an awry outcome.

Mindful of the threat, Matz preferred to conceal himself, which the darkness easily allowed. Up the tree he thought of a better plan. And so he came to take a cunning revenge, as his own ghost, on the man who had plunged him into misfortune.

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The bird was back in its cage, but even though his ardent wish had been fulfilled, even though Matz had seen his wife and child, the tasty prison fare pleased his palate no longer.

Then one day in the seventh week of his imprisonment, Tall Peter rushed into his cell with glad tidings. Several days before, Brother Josephus had announced to him that wheels were turning to help the Brünnhof Farmer. The pardon had now arrived, at noon this day he would be set free, and his first steps, the Brother had told him, must take him to the Guardian in the monastery, who was to thank for his release. Only – none of this must become known.

And as Matz really stood before the Guardian and stammered out his thanks, the worthy man of God pointed with a smile to a man in the background, and said: “This is the man upon whose intercession you have found mercy. It is him you must thank.”

Tobinger stepped forward and shook Matz’s hand. The latter looked

him in the eye and said:

“If that is the case, then all shall be forgotten, then I shall acquit you too, then you shall have your black fish with noodles at Christmas!”

A joyous lustre flew over Tobinger’s countenance. A heavy, heavy load fell from his breast, he heaved a sigh and said, “God bless you thousandfold!”

The Finest Natural Wonder

“Oh, what a nice pong!” little Fritz said to himself, and he sucked in the good stink time after time. A really decent little lad, all things considered! Only, his haircut had not turned out well at all. Earlier, the situation had looked far worse, because almost the whole of the back of his head had been bare. But now, happily, the stubble was starting to appear which promised the necessary replenishment of hair growth. The little fellow was himself partly to blame for that disfigurement: he had bowed his head too anxiously, too deeply, because he had not had any real confidence in his mother’s hair-cutting skill. If he had had the proper confidence, it would – perhaps – have been justified. But as for the matter of his breeches not “being on top of the situation,” Fritz is truly innocent. Yet his mother, who is an “amateur” in the making of men’s clothes, also cannot be blamed in particular for this work of art having taken such rule-defying and cranky shape, or for Fritz’s ill-mannered fellow schoolboys having dedicated a solemnly satirical song to these trousers: “Narrow bottoms, wide at top” – etc.

At this moment, however, Fritz is thinking neither of his hair nor his

trousers. His ears are taking delight in the marvellous roaring, his nose in the splendid stink, and his eyes in the garish painting up there over the entrance to the animal show-booth.

It is a long time since the tall, handsome, long-bearded man before the booth deigned to look at the little boy, although it was obviously not because of impoliteness or deficient thirst for knowledge that Fritz had not, up to that point, accepted Longbeard's insistent invitations to the public to come on over and step inside. This man before the booth with his long black beard, with his powerful voice, with his gift for oratory – it was quite incomprehensible, his not having dedicated himself to a career in politics! – What a parliamentary ornament, what a national pride he could have become, the man before the booth!

Whenever the animals stopped roaring, Longbeard began to roar. "The finest natural wonder in the world" – as he cried, time and time again – "is the beast of the wilderness, exuding power and splendour: the lion, the Bengal tiger, the elephant and the boa – they can all be seen here. Come in, ladies and gentlemen, come in!"

The appeal was very effective, and apart from little Fritz there was only a tall, slovenly gentleman with a flattened beret who would neither move away nor comply with the insistent bidding. With his spectacles, he stared incessantly at the garish painting: now the polar bears fighting with eskimos, now the Indian whom the teeth-baring tiger threatened to drag down from his elephant, now the terrible lion who was tearing a negro limb from limb. Between whiles the stranger would throw, while restlessly pulling away at his thin, reddish beard, many a side-glance at our Fritz, as

if in mockery, and suddenly he gave the latter a sign to step to one side with him. "Do you know, little fellow," he said, "you could do me a service. You see, I would like to buy one of the beasts inside there as a birthday present for my Aunt Rosalia, you know, for she is an enthusiast of beasts of prey and has a small zoological garden. Now I don't want to rely on my own taste, you know, and so I'd be really glad if you just went in and had a look at the animals."

And taking out his purse, he added, "I'll pay, of course... You keep what's left over; there are probably apples on sale inside for the monkeys and bread for the elephants. Just take a thorough look at everything; I'll wait for you here, and you'll give me a general idea of what would be most apt for my Aunt Rosalia."

So greatly welcome was this surprising commission that its peculiar nature did not leap to Fritz's eye in the least. Joy nipped all misgivings in the bud.

"The finest natural wonder in the world is the beast of the wilderness" – so cried the man before the booth once more, and he stopped in amazement when little Fritz, with all the elation of a newly-appointed expert in matters of beasts of prey, came walking up the steps and requested a first-class admission ticket. When the boy had disappeared behind the red curtain, Aunt Rosalia's tall nephew gazed after him with a grin, only to rush off.

The boy was to remember the wonderful impressions of this, his first visit to see beasts of prey, all his life. Now, everything was not so marvellous as on the pictures outside. No Moor fought with the lion, and no

Indian with the tiger, and as for the polar bears...

Wait, the Director with the red tasseled hat has just been asked by a cheeky mercantile youth where the advertised polar bears actually are.

The Director gruffly replies, "Croaked, both of them, last week in Salzburg, because they couldn't stand the heat."

"And the giraffe, who is also mentioned in the posters?"

"Croaked in Linz," said the Director, who seemed to be highly irritated at having his emotional wounds, which had hardly cicatrised yet, so clumsily prodded.

"Hmm," the mercantile youth mocked, "the giraffe was probably not able to bear the cold."

"Strambach," the Director flared up, "are you trying to make me responsible for your abominable European climate?"

The youth withdrew to the baboons, while Fritz found the director's wrath at the impertinent questions to be entirely justified, for indeed, even if the polar bears and the giraffe were missing, there still remained enough to excite. And there really was a woman sitting there selling bread for the elephants and apples for the monkeys.

As for the question of what should be chosen as the aptest for the birthday of that Aunt Rosalia, the youth soon cleared that up. Decidedly the elephant, for really, it was curious what tricks this animal knew: playing the barrel-organ, calling the waiter over with the table-bell, eating from a plate while wearing a serviette etc.

With the advisory opinion on his lips, "You must buy the elephant," Fritz walked down the steps. However, look around as much as he might,

nowhere was there a trace of the unknown gentleman to be found.

Only much later did the little man realise the solution to the mystery. Only much later did he become aware that, at that time, the stranger may have read the desire, which was so easy to read, in the boy's eyes, and that the peculiar commission was only a gentle, merry pretext for the small yet gladdening gift. And always, when Fritz thinks back to this little adventure, he feels that the finest natural wonder was outside the booth at that time, and not inside as Longbeard had claimed. For the finest natural wonder is not "the beast of the wilderness, exuding power and splendour"; the finest natural wonder is a good person.

On the Stormy Night

Strange! He had fallen asleep in the most blissful of moods, with a tender billet at his lips. The sinker into sleep had dreamed a magnificent coach-and six with charming guardian-angel-jockeys before his bed, the words of the letter had echoed around him like heavenly music! "Very well, I shall be yours forever!" ... An enchanting, unclothed figure had floated, scattering flowers, in front of the procession, the happy procession to Paradise... And now, in the middle of the night, something seizes him and jerks him up... strange, strange!

Did his happiness rouse him? Oh no, it does not take such a rough hold, his gentle happiness. Or was the dinner perhaps... Nonsense! This customer was immune to contemptible gossip – and his stomach, that honest, lobster-proof companion – oh nonsense, nonsense! But the storm, oh yes, it may well have been the storm that is shaking the frost-painted

windows: Brr! –

Now the howls of rage die away, dissolving into distant groans and whimpers: the winter night weeps because the storm whips her. Or does the storm weep because he feels so cold? – In any case – Berthold endeavours with great urgency to convince himself that it is a pleasant feeling to lie here in cosy warmth, well-fed, crowned with good fortune, while outside millions are starving, millions are freezing, millions are groaning and whimpering and howling...

Brr – it rattles and shakes again with all its might. Indeed, the old Roman – now what is his name? – was perfectly right:

*Suave, mari magno, turbantibus aequora ventis...*⁵

Berthold is still working on restoring the effaced continuation of the quotation – when he interrupts himself with the words, blurted out almost in a loud voice: “I’m a cad!”

He tries to smile. “I a cad? Very good! Am I not the most soft-hearted person on God’s earth? Have I not given countless beggars... All right; they are all still begging today, no doubt, those I have given to over the course of forty years. But, good Heavens, is it possible to thoroughly help everyone?... Stop, my boy, there’s the rub!... Because I cannot help out *everybody*, for that reason I have helped out *nobody*... That is the abominable, atrocious, insane paralogism!... Yes, I am a cad!... My good

⁵ The opening of Book II of Lucretius’s (c.99 - c.55 B.C.) poem *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of Things*): “What joy it is, when out at sea the stormwinds are lashing the waters.” The continuation is: “to gaze from the shore at the heavy stress some other man is enduring!” [e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem] Translation from Ronald Latham, *Lucretius: The Nature of the Universe*, Penguin Classics, 1951.

fortune is boundless; to crown it all, the most marvellous woman in the world is now going to be mine own forever... I sun myself, I stretch out on my millions, I feel a pleasant tingling run through me at the thought of the howls and the chattering teeth of the poor and the wretched... And because I have thrown them, all in all, alms which scattered into ridiculous atoms, I imagine all that to make me a good-natured fellow!... Oh, I am terrified of myself. But things shall change. Tomorrow – no, this day... at once, I shall pay off my debt to the human race. I shall save one individual from pressing need, but that one shall be *wholly* helped... But who is to be the fortunate man?... Karl, my servant?... Hmm, that honest soul would deserve it... but it won't do. I shall not easily find a replacement for him. Magnanimity cannot go quite so far as that... Perhaps the coachman?... Hmm, I could certainly do without that scoundrel and his disturbing inclination to alcohol. But that would mean rewarding vice!... No, it shall be a complete stranger, I'll reach out boldly into the throng of human life to fish out the *one* who shall become free and happy through me."

He pressed the bell-button. His servant appeared, half-asleep. "Give me my clothes, the fur-cloak, cigars. I shall go for a walk."

Karl stared at him, speechless, pointed to the wall-clock and stammered, "Pardon me, your Grace... it is midnight."

"I can see that."

"A terrible storm..."

"I can hear that."

"Tiles are falling from roofs..."

A sharp look from Berthold closed the servant's lips. When he had

dressed, Berthold opened the iron money-casket. “Twenty thousand guilders,” he murmured, “I dare say that will suffice.”

Wrapped up to, and over, the ears, Berthold strode through night and wind. “That good Karl,” he said to himself, “is without doubt firmly convinced that I have gone doolally. And seen by the light of day... Lord, this is becoming unpleasant; one cannot even smoke... A poor devil, such a policeman. How about using him to square my account with the human race before a chimney falls on my head! But no. A policeman would immediately think... what Karl thinks. He would take me to the police station with gentle force and the whole adventure would prematurely come to a ludicrous end – or even a tragic one, if the policeman was proved right, and I, because of ‘mental derangement arising from official duties,’ ended up in the Fool’s Tower⁶ or at least kept under close watch. Mental derangement! Truly, a most uncomfortable thought! Is it not an ominous sign that I have cast my eye with such intensity on a circus-rider?... That I should want to buy, with my freedom, a happiness which perhaps... could be freely enjoyed... Ugh! It is awful even to think of such a thing when I have sufficiently convinced myself that... it is not on any account to be thought of... No, I am not mad, never before have I thought so clearly as now, and my heart feels lighter than ever... But is nobody going to show his face? Suffering humanity is sitting on its hands... Oh, if the people only knew that a muffled-up Harun al-Rashid, an Emperor Joseph, was passing through the streets, then the town would certainly not be deserted!”

⁶ The Narrenturm. An asylum built in Vienna in 1784, containing five storeys and 139 cells.

Now a homeless man in a scanty coat came up the road, having already begged from two people in vain. A greenhorn who still hesitated to have a try with a third person. At the last moment, the incorrigible lack-luck lost heart. His excuse to himself was this: "Why beg for money for a night's lodging with little prospect of success, when it would, after all, only be wasted at this late hour?"

Berthold walked past without perceiving the unfortunate man. He was too deeply engrossed in the contemplation of his greatness of soul; his eyes became moist with emotion. Now it was clear what a base injustice he had done himself earlier when, after waking, he had precipitately accused himself of having a petty cast of mind... No shadow, no trace of motivation from a desire to be admired clings to the great feat he has in mind. Nobody must learn anything about his magnanimous undertaking. He longs only for a single pair of eyes to be there, to secretly follow him with astonished joy! Leontine's ardently-blue pair of eyes... Oh, you wondrously fair Gretchen⁷ on horseback, if you could just see me now and knew what kind of heart is beating in your friend's breast...

Clink... There, indeed, lie the broken pieces of a window-pane. The matter is becoming unpleasant. Is there still no-one, damn it, who will come and take my money from me?

At this moment, a young man approaches with long strides, his broad-brimmed hat pressed down deep in his countenance, his head bent forward. The nocturnal wanderer wildly waves his stick around as though

⁷ A reference to Gretchen in Goethe's *Faust*, who symbolises innocence and pure love.

he were fighting with the storm, and as he sails past, he groans out a word that Berthold can clearly hear, and then once more, and again the same word: “Money! Money! Money!”

“Hallo, young friend, one moment...”

“What can I do for you, sir?”

Berthold looks searchingly at the slender youth from out of his cosy fur-skin. My word, a splendid young man. Black eyes full of fire – a countenance full of nobility and verve.

Berthold cleared his throat. “You have just,” he smiled, “let fall a deep sigh, which makes me think: ‘of the emptiness of the pocket his mouth speaketh.’”⁸

“Sir, I swear to you that I am not in the mood to be teased.”

“Very well, and I swear to you that I *am* in the mood to seriously grant the dearest wish which you cried out into the stormy night in your monosyllabic monologue... Not so fast, my dear fellow! I know fine well, it would be an insult to your honour were I to offer you a single, offer you five or ten guilders. But let us assume that I laid a hundred or a thousand or ten thousand or even more in the palm of your hand – would you still challenge me to a duel?”

The other broke out into merry laughter. “By God,” he cried, “you are right! Feel free to try it with a thousand or a hundred, and you will see with what equanimity I shall swallow the insult. Indeed, perhaps even fifty guilders would not draw a ‘Tush’ from me – because it is you; for, to put it

⁸ A play on Luke 6:45: “of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.”

candidly, you are beginning to win my interest.”

“This prize should come in very useful for you, if you will have the goodness to tell me honestly what you... need the money for.”

They had arrived at a street-lantern whose storm-shaken glass walls rattled around its flickering flame. The young man leant against it with folded arms and cried: “What do I need money for? – to develop my artistic talent, for I feel an army of immortal images in my fist! – to save the most delightful creature on this planet from the embraces of a wretched, swanking moneybags! – to be free and happy – to not go mad from...”

“Enough, enough; your desire truly needs no further explanation. Here, you have your wish!”

Stunned, the young man received the wallet, opened it, checked its contents, and stammered:

“Impossible! This is a dream-vision, a fairy-tale... Such magnanimity cannot exist in reality... And yet, I am indisputably awake... And these notes, they are undoubtedly real... And you yourself, sir, you are... oh, allow me... to my breast... no, no, you are no illusion... I embrace and kiss flesh and blood... oh, forgive me, I cannot help it... Good God!”

“But man... you’re out of your senses, damn it... Uff... I’m suffocating!”

“You most noble, you most splendid... My heart is fit to burst... You must come with me... A bottle of champagne... No, no, I shall brook no contradiction!”

“You are too kind, but it is impossible. Drink my health on your own tomorrow.”

“Then at least let us go into this café. I must after all see the angel contained within this rough integument. I still do not even know what my heavenly tutelary spirit is called, and you also have no idea as yet of the name of the man whom your greatness of soul has made the happiest under the sun.”

“Oh, alright,” answered Berthold, whose arm the other held in a firm embrace, “we shall spend a minute together with a dram of cognac, but I shall keep my cap and fur on, and as far as names are concerned, you may not learn mine nor I yours.”

They walked into the almost empty and now only poorly lit saloon.

“Hey there, bring us cognac... You actually wish, my dearest guardian angel, to remain in this disguise? Well, your wishes are sacred to me... But there is one thing you must permit me: as a small token of eternal gratitude, I shall... send you my Godiva... she will certainly please you.”

Berthold leapt to his feet in indignation. “Your Godiva?... Your... girlfriend?”

“Oh no sir, how could you possibly think that!... She did, admittedly, sit for me for it... But Godiva is a painting... It depicts the noble lady celebrated in song by Tennyson, how she, to deliver the poor from an oppressive tax burden, condescends, in accordance with her husband’s diabolical suggestion, to don the costume of Anadyomene⁹ and... I suppose you remember that splendid poem? Take, I beg you, the

⁹ Aphrodite/Venus. The name means “the one who emerges from the sea” and so refers to her naked.

pictorialisation of this noble deed in remembrance of the high-minded act through which you have saved me!”

“No, dear friend. I did not leave my warm bed at midnight for the purpose of buying paintings. You keep your Godiva, with which you may very soon be capable of forging a path as an artist. At any rate, your choice of matter betrays a certain receptivity to current trends.”

A shadow flew over the young man’s countenance. “Alas, no,” he sighed, “the matter seems, on the contrary, to raise offence. Yesterday, the painting, on which I had set such great hopes, was rejected by the local exhibition committee. And as bad luck usually comes in twos, so the postman brought me this letter at the same time.”

He took a sheet out of his pocket-book and read: “**God be with you, it could have been so fine!**¹⁰ How happily I would have been yours forever, but – **what are the hopes, what are the plans, that man, the transient, builds up?**¹¹ Ask not why it cannot be. Let none request to hear my fate. **Our pleasant sojourn in Aranjuez is over now.**¹² **Between the lips and goblet-rim, there floats the hand of powers grim**¹³...”

“Enough, enough! I clearly see: a basket full of Büchmann’s poultry.¹⁴ And do you really have no idea why beautiful Godiva sends you

¹⁰ From an aria in Viktor Ernst Nessler’s (1841-1890) opera, *Der Trompeter von Säckingen* (1884), based on the enormously popular epic poem of 1853 by Joseph Victor von Scheffel (1826-86).

¹¹ Friedrich Schiller, *The Bride of Messina* (Act 3, Scene 5).

¹² Schiller, *Don Carlos* (the opening lines).

¹³ The poem “König Ankäos” by Johann Friedrich Kind (1768-1843).

¹⁴ The philologist Georg Büchmann (1822-1884) published an extremely successful collection of quotations called “Geflügelte Worte” (“Winged Words”), which first appeared in 1864. In German, to “give someone a basket” (“einen Korb geben”) means to turn down their romantic advances.

this refusal?”

“Oh, I can certainly imagine why! She should, in all honesty, have concluded her citations thus: **Frailty, they name is woman**¹⁵... **To gold cling all, towards gold throng all, all!**¹⁶ But sir, in spite of all this, you should not think badly of her. She is weak – that is all. But now, thanks to your heavenly magnanimity, I can tear up the net; I can go up to her and say to her: Here, look at this money! I am free, the road to fame and fortune lies open before me! And if she then asks after the origin of this money, I shall tell her that some mad Englishman bought my Godiva off me.”

“Capital! But as far as I am concerned... I have no desire to be the Englishman in this charming comedy. So once more: please keep your painting and give me – a small memento of our time together would at any rate be welcome – some bagatelle, such as the letter of farewell which you were good enough to read out to me and which has now become redundant.”

“With a thousand pleasures. Here, sir. And if, in my want of address, I spoke of a mad Englishman...”

“But I beg you... Heavens, two o’clock already! Pst, waiter!”

“What?” cried the young man, leaping to his feet. “You wish to pay for the cognac? No, never, I cannot possibly permit that... impossible, impossible! You must leave that to me.”

“Alright, if you absolutely insist... I acquiesce with many thanks, all

¹⁵ Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Act 1, Scene 2).

¹⁶ Goethe, *Faust, Part One* (Evening: Margaret with a lamp).

the more so as I have just noticed that I have no money on me at the moment. But now, and this you must promise me, remain seated here for a quarter of an hour longer until I have got myself to safety. Adieu, dear friend, and good luck!”

After he had submitted to one final fiery embrace, Berthold headed for home. He would have liked to embrace himself, so delighted was he by his deed and by the sovereign humour he had displayed in the process. And when he was lying in bed again and nestling into the warm covers, when he dreamed the coach-and-six was there before him once more and he was flying along, with rosy clouds floating around him, he murmured, “Oh, how good it does to do good!”

In the morning, his first clear thought after waking was that the help of the police must be enlisted to take the twenty thousand guilders back from the rascal; his second, that the first be discarded as absurd; his third, to call the doctor over by phone.

Before the doctor came, Karl brought the lie-in-bed a letter.

“Ah, a morning greeting from my delightful Leontine. Let us see how quickly the mist of my bad mood will melt away in this sunshine.”

He read, “God be with you, dear sir, it was not meant to be. Between the lips and goblet-rim there floats the hand of powers grim. The pleasant sojourn in Aranjuez which awaited me as your future companion through life is over now. I cannot name to you the obstacle that parts us two forever. Let none request to hear my fate. Farewell! Your Leontine.”

With a decidedly idiotic smile, Berthold stared into space. “This letter – haven’t I just recently, somewhere...” He passed his hand over his

brow. “Oh, that’s right, last night! The rascal read it out to me... He even, I believe, gave it to me... as a memento of my twenty thousand guilders... Hey there, Karl! Karl! There must be a letter in my fur-coat... Quickly! Quickly!”

Berthold unfolded the sheet... “Oh! Oh! It just gets better and better... The rascal’s letter is also from Leontine! To crown it all, even the signature! Oh! Oh! Both letters from her hand... the content pretty much the same. The one to me, the other to the rascal! I am faced with a mystery... Ridiculous! The solution is staring me in the face. He and she love each other. He painted her as... what’s her name, something highly uninhibited. And she acted so prudish towards me that in the end I hit upon the glorious idea of marrying her. And because she liked my money even more than the rascal, she wrote to him, “God be with you...” But in the meantime, I threw the money into his maw last night, and he – I can picture it vividly – at first cockcrow, he drags her out of bed, holds the money under her nose and cries, “Voilà, the crazy English begin to scrap over my paintings!” And she, hot-blooded as she is, immediately rushes out of his arms straight to the desk, she clearly possesses a handbook of model letters, a ‘Love as Letter-Writer’ or whatever else these helpful source books are called! And so she writes out, all chipper and cheerful, the same pack of lies for me that she had written out for him shortly before... “God be with you, it wasn’t...”

Berthold burst into a hearty roar of laughter.

The doctor walked in. “You are very cheerful, I see,” he said, wiping his misted-over glasses clean. “What may the matter be?”

“Oh, nothing of any consequence. I just feel a little unsound in mind... Do not laugh, I am dead serious. The swarms of flies before my eyes are becoming madder and madder... and last night I suffered a tremendous attack of magnanimity. At midnight I get up, take a sum which I absolutely do not wish to name out of the money chest, wander around in the stormy night like a somnambulist, until I run into a good-for-nothing and present him with the money...”

“You will just have dreamed it.”

“No, I have the proofs in black and white: the rogue was so obliging as to hand me a kind of receipt.”

“Then there is nothing further to be done. However, should this nightly fit of magnanimity recur, then call for me at once. You can then simply give the money to me and save yourself the wandering around.”

“And you do not care to settle on a serious opinion of my condition?”

“Oh, why not then. My serious opinion is that you epicurise too much. If I were you, I would leave wine, women and song alone for a twelvemonth and go travelling.”

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A year later, Berthold had taken the doctor’s advice to heart and bid adieu to wine and women and all the trimmings and trappings. But a man must, after all, do *something*, and so Berthold had finally lighted upon the hobby of – having himself photographed.

The collection of his photographic portraits swelled to fabulous dimensions, and gradually the thousandfold sight of his own features made the image of the beautiful circus-rider fade in his memory. Thanks to his

new, rational way of life, no alarming outbreak of his long-suppressed philanthropy had recurred. At the moment when we find him again, he is walking cheerfully through the main streets of a large town in which his portrait has never, up to the present, been taken.

He has just entered the reception-room of a photographer's atelier and been greeted by a pale, sunken-eyed person, at the sight of whom Berthold exclaims: "What the deuce... I think we have seen one another, somewhere before?"

"I confess that I am not able to remember."

"But we have, my dear fellow. It was on a wild, stormy night... in what's its name. You have certainly changed a little since then, and, to speak honestly, not in a favourable way. At that time you were good enough to stand me a dram of cognac and, on top of that, give me an extremely interesting..."

The other heaved a deep sigh. "So it is you!" he ejaculated. "I must confess that I had reached the point of assuming that it was not Heaven, as I initially and erroneously believed, but Hell that sent you at that time... But you are assuredly a noble person and cannot help it that your money brought me... no blessing."

"No blessing! What is this I'm hearing? And your... Godiva?"

"You still remember?" the photographer said with a sad smile. "Very well, here she is!"

And with these words he pulled a green curtain open. Berthold's eyes roamed in amazement over an extensive canvas that had been painted throughout with naïve pluck. No doubt – that was... that was

supposed to be Leontine. As Godiva, completely unclad, she rode through the streets on a badly drawn black horse, her chalky incarnation threatening to dissolve into the twilight of a laborious architecture. The similarity of the features was unmistakable, the execution of the whole certainly grotesque.

“I was still poor at colour at that time; also, the lighting here is not favourable.”

“Hmm! That would have been right up Makart’s¹⁷ street. A shame that he let this matter escape him. At any rate, very good for a beginner. But to be honest, when I asked about your Godiva, I was actually thinking less of this painting and rather of the original.”

“The original? Leontine? Well, she tormented, ruined, forsook me. There you have the story of my marriage in three words.”

“Poor young man! And you had no luck in art either?”

“Oh sir, I had made my reckoning without the – art-critics. These ignoramuses, wherever I went, - ignored me. So in the end I gave myself up to photography... But my spirit is unbroken. I shall struggle through, I shall fight my way to the fore single-handedly...”

He broke off. A female monstrosity had rolled in from the adjoining room, an avalanche of flesh which manifestly grew as it rolled. When the hulking mass, after an impotent attempt to curtsy, had disappeared again, the young man whispered, “The proprietress of our business, a well-to-do widow... Between you and me, I have chances to, one day...”

¹⁷ Hans Makart (1840-1884), Austria history painter. His *Entry of Charles V into Antwerp* (1878) caused controversy through its inclusion of nude virgins.

“What, unhappy wretch! That fairground freak – you want to...”

“Marry her, naturally. Corporeally, she is certainly not so lovely as Leontine, but Mrs. Müller makes up for it with her good heart. And above all... I need money, for I am of a mind to throw myself into the photomechanical illustration technology, bringing entirely new ideas. And now sir, I ask you to step in, it will be your turn in next to no time.”

While Berthold took position in front of the apparatus so as to have the strongest possible effect, he said to himself: “So Leontine tormented, ruined, and forsook him. It is highly probable that she would have done exactly the same to me if I had not had the fortuitous idea of leaving my bed on that stormy night to buy myself out from her. Strange, strange! There does seem, after all, to be some truth in the maxim found in children’s books: ‘Every good deed finds its reward, even when no earthly eye sees it!’”

Mr. Lilystalk

The gentlemen of the District Court at Oberbirkenberg have an immense amount of paperwork accumulated throughout the livelong year on account of the numerous slaps to the face with which Mr. Lilystalk, a man of independent means who is resident there, is continually visited. The documents about the Matter of the Lilystalkian Face-slaps already form their own big and bulky section of the filing cabinet. Mr. Lilystalk seems to carry on this matter in a positively sporting fashion, and superstitious folk assert that he must have horn-skin on his face, similar to

Horny Siegfried of past days, and that was the reason why he felt nothing and did not let it bother him when he took a slap to the chops.

Mr. Lilystalk had come to Oberbirkenberg about a year before. A mysterious veil floated over his past, and for a long time nothing was learned about him save that he was an uncommonly spiteful and malicious companion. Whether he stood with the Liberals or the Clericalists, the Conservatives or the Radicals, nobody ever could learn, even though Lilystalk eagerly participated in highly political battles of words in the pubs every evening. He mocked everything and everyone, whereby he brought upon himself assaults of the kind referred to above from all possible parties.

When it began to grow dark, Mr. Lilystalk would leave his residence to go out on the hunt for face-slaps, and he came home, usually laden with booty, towards midnight. Oberbirkenberg may be only a small town, but on account of the important cattle markets which frequently take place there, it usually has a very lively influx of strangers, and there are consequently a good dozen inns around the marketplace. Lilystalk worked his way through them one by one as a rule. On entering the lounge, he would survey the situation with a quick look. If he saw someone with an especially embarrassing feature, e.g. a red nose or a bald head, he would sit down beside him with a friendly greeting, politely inquire after his name and origin, begin with the state of the weather and then, with a bold transition, come to talk about the bodily defect of the person concerned. Without palpably offending his partner, he knew how to gradually exasperate him, particularly with the help of his spiteful, sarcastic laugh, to such an extent

that the other would in actuality have needed to have undergone a transfusion of lamb's blood not to end up flying into a rage. Mr. Lilystalk began e.g. by having the good man tell him about the condition of the winter fruit at great length. Suddenly Mr. Lilystalk interrupts the man. "You have indeed a really handsome nose," he observes, "but it is much too red, much, much too red."

The red-nosed one remarks with a sour smile that he has tried many remedies but none of them have worked.

The conversation returns to the young crops, and when the other man has become a little chatty again, Mr. Lilystalk looks him fixedly in the face and bursts into loud laughter. "Forgive me," he says, "it is truly strange; I have seen many red noses in my life, but so red, so red as yours —"

"Sir, I beg you," the other says with a frown, "leave my nose in peace; I do not like to talk about it."

"Well, I beg your pardon," says Mr. Lilystalk. The conversation again turns from the nose to agriculture.

"You know," Mr. Lilystalk interpolates after a while with an innocent expression, "You know, your esteemed nose is actually not red at all, but brownish; it also has a touch of violet."

"Damn it, sir, do not make a fool of me, or it will go ill with you!" Thus cries Mr. Lilystalk's victim, and the red of his nose has spread over all of his face. However, the more incensed the man becomes, the more does Mr. Lilystalk shake with laughter, and when the teased one at length begins to threaten slaps, Mr. Lilystalk splits his sides. Now the other's patience

finally snaps and – smack! – his threat has been translated into action.

Now Mr. Lilystalk very coolly takes out his notebook, makes a note of the face-slap and the donator's address, which he had ferreted out at the beginning of the conversation, drinks the last of his beer, takes his leave most courteously, and goes on to the next inn.

Often, in the 'Golden Lion' or the 'Green Eagle,' he would make his way to the Gentleman's Table, when things were a bit livelier there and the conversation had come onto a "higher" scientific topic. In the beginning, he always behaved with tremendous subservience, but he soon sought to do the lion's share of the talking and declared everything to be "nonsense" and "ludicrous." When, at last, some raging tenant-farmer or estate-manager stood up, banged his glass on the table and demanded he be quiet, then Mr. Lilystalk became even more impetuous, and the upshot of all this was usually five fingers flying into his face.

This happened to him e.g. once on the part of Löwen the apothecary, and on account of cremation, which Mr. Lilystalk spoke up for with true zeal. Another time, he received a "killer slap" from the Head Forester of Wildenau because he contested the immortality of the soul. Indeed, even the reverend priest, who lionized Henrici¹⁸ at that time, was seized with such a zealous wrath that he gave Lilystalk a thunderous slap to the chops because he had declared that all anti-Semites should go to the D-.

Then every Saturday, Mr. Lilystalk would go to the District Court with

¹⁸ Ernst Henrici (1854-1915), teacher and anti-Semitic agitator.

a stack of complaints, to notify avenging justice of all the assaults that had come upon him in the course of the week. The assailants were then given the conventional sentence: to pay a fine of five to ten guilders into the Poor Fund.

Now one evening, Mr. Lilystalk came into the 'Golden Lion' in strange apparel. Instead of his usual shabby coat, he wore an ancient tail-coat; a large white cravat shone dazzling at his neck, and he waved an old-fashioned top-hat with his gloved right hand. He walked into the lounge with countless bows and modestly took a seat in a corner. The fat innkeeper of the 'Lion' went out muttering and gave the waiter the instruction to place a glass of the bottom-of-the-barrel 'Dregs' before the unwelcome guest as usual. The host of the 'Lion' would most have liked to throw Mr. Lilystalk out, but he well knew that the latter would pin a plaint for assault on him if he did.

In the lounge there were sitting, apart from Mr. Lilystalk, only a few regular guests at a side-table. Old, retired Major Brandenstein, an ardent admirer of great Napoleon, was doing all the talking. When the guests caught sight of Lilystalk entering – who had already brought most of them before court – they at once sent a crossfire of furious looks at him. The major had in the meantime ordered a bottle of Rudesheim wine to be brought over; he was just in the middle of a description of the Battle of the Nations at Leipzig and explaining how the French Emperor, although he had had to fight against enemy forces double the size of his own, nevertheless came within a whisker of winning the battle. "Napoleon," cried the old warrior, "was, is, and ever will be the most brilliant man in the

world!”

A half-suppressed laugh interrupted the major. Everyone looked over at Lilystalk, who had just raised his glass to his lips and was now spluttering beer out his mouth and nose in laughter. Highly annoyed, the major repeated his assertion in an even louder voice. Lilystalk doubled up with a fit of the giggles and held a large red handkerchief to his mouth. “Is there perhaps any objection to be raised to that?” the major cried over.

Lilystalk leapt to his feet and walked with a smile to the regulars’ table.

“Begging your pardon,” he lisped, “but the major is surely pleased to be only jesting. It is generally known of Napoleon that he was certainly a very brave man, but...”

Mr. Lilystalks pointed smilingly at his brow.

“Express yourself more plainly!” cried the major, red with rage.

“Well then,” answered the other, “I simply mean that Napoleon is notorious for having been very limited with regard to intellect – a little, as they say, cracked in the head.”

“Who is cracked in the head? *You* are the one cracked in the head!” roared the major.

“But have the goodness to allow, it has been established, after all...”

“Be silent, I tell you, or there will be a disaster!”

“But pardon me, recent historical research...”

And so, a few more words flew quickly back and forth, until finally – thwack – Mr. Lilystalk had another slap round the face.

Lilystalk breathed a big sigh of relief, and a curious change came

over his face. His features, so spiteful and malicious, gained all at once a touchingly amiable, wistful expression. “My heartfelt thanks, major; that was the three hundredth!” Thus spake Lilystalk with a deep bow, while he took out his notebook.

And when he had noted down the face-slap and put the book back away, he made the following speech to the astonished guests: “Yes, gentlemen, that was the three hundredth slap round the face I have received, and if you see me here in festive attire on this occasion, the reason for that is none other than my standing before you today as, so to speak, a Face-slap Jubilarian. I thank Destiny, gentlemen, that it has today finally allowed me to appear before you in a true light, after I have wandered around among you as a malicious, quarrelsome man for so long. Today I can tell you that I do not deserve your disdain, gentlemen; for today, the cycle of three hundred slaps round the face, which I made it my life’s work to receive, is concluded.”

Mr. Lilystalk squeezed out a tear and continued: “Fate did not bless me with the good things in life, but it gave me a heart that beats warmly for great human misery. Sometimes in sleepless nights it lay like a leaden weight on my heart that I was so utterly incapable of doing anything to alleviate the terrible, pressing plight under which so many unhappy souls languish. Miserable man – I said to myself – why are you in the world if you cannot do the slightest thing for all the whimpering widows and waifs? – And one day, at such a time, a thought flashed through my brain. It was the thought that fines imposed in actions for injury flow into the Poor Box, and that through a systematic exploitation of this circumstance, much could be

done for the poor and needy population. Well! – I said to myself in jubilation – you may not have money and estates, but you have two strong, healthy cheeks: go forth, Lilystalk, and let your face be slapped for the good of the poor. It was a road full of thorns that I trod, gentlemen! I, the mild, benevolent philanthropist, had to turn my whole nature upside down, had from that time on not to let any opportunity to have my face slapped pass me by unseized, had, on the contrary, even to force such opportunities. To receive three hundred slaps round the face – that was the goal I had set myself for my martyrdom, and today I have reached that goal. I may have had to bear and suffer much, I may have had to make myself look quite ridiculous in various localities, I may also have forfeited your respect and friendship as a seemingly objectionable and insupportable man, gentlemen, but the thought of the many tears I have dried has amply compensated me for everything. And when I, today, finally find rest for my weary head, it happens in the elevating awareness of having procured a sum of over two thousand guilders for the poor.”

A shimmer of ecstasy shone over Lilystalk’s face when he had finished. No eye had remained dry during his narration. The old major stood up and shook his hand, deeply moved. “Bravo!” he said, “you are a good, noble man, be pleased to seat yourself with us.” Several more bottles of wine were quickly brought over, and soon so joyful an atmosphere developed that everyone flung their arms around the neck of the upstanding man who had been so long misjudged.

Amidst the general rejoicing, a light shadow flew over the major’s

brow. “*A propos*,”¹⁹ he said, “concerning Napoleon, I must request Mr. Lilystalk to revoke!”

“With pleasure, if the major will be pleased to pay the ten guilders forfeited in our quarrel earlier.”

The major deposited the money at once, and Mr. Lilystalk cried, raising his glass, “Three cheers for the most brilliant man in the world, Emperor Napoleon I. Vivat!”

“And for good, worthy Mr. Lilystalk besides!” cried the major, and so emotional was he that shining tears ran down his cheeks.

¹⁹ “By the way.”