

# The Wonderful History of Peter Schlemihl

## I.

After a safe but, for me, very arduous voyage, we finally reached port. As soon as the boat set me on land, I loaded my little belongings on my back, and, pushing my way through the swarming crowd, I walked into the nearest, humblest house fronted with a hanging sign. I desired a room; the boots, taking my measure with a glance, led me to a garret. I had fresh water brought to me, together with an exact description of where I could find Mr Thomas John: "In front of the North Gate, the first country house on the right-hand side, a large, new house, of red and white marble, with many columns." Good.

The hour was yet early; I at once untied my bundle, took out my newly-turned black coat, dressed myself neatly in my best clothes, put my letter of introduction into my pocket, and set out on my way to the man who was to promote my modest expectations.

After I had climbed up the long North Street and reached the Gate, I saw the columns shimmering through the greenery. "So here it is," I thought. I wiped the dust from my feet with my handkerchief, straightened my cravat, and pulled the bell in God's name. The door flew open. I had to pass an examination in the hall; but the porter announced my arrival, and I had the honour to be summoned to the park where Mr John was taking the air - with a small company. I recognised the man at once from the sheen of his portly self-satisfaction. He received me very well - as a rich man receives a poor devil, even

turning towards me, without however turning away from the rest of the company – and took the proffered letter from my hand.

“So, so! from my brother; I have heard nothing from him for a long time. I trust he is in health? – Over there,” he continued to the company, without waiting for a reply, pointing with the letter to a hill, “over there I am having the new building erected.” He broke the seal without breaking the conversation, which was steered onto the subject of wealth. “Whoever is not master of at least a million,” he exclaimed, “that man is, excuse the word, a blackguard!”

“Oh, how true!” I cried, with full, overflowing feeling. That must have pleased him; he smiled at me and said: “Stay here, dear friend, I may have time later to tell you what I think of this” – here indicating the letter, which he then pocketed, before turning to the company again. He offered his arm to a young lady, other gentlemen made themselves busy around other beauties, matters arranged themselves in the proper fashion, and everyone surged towards a hill rich with blooming roses.

I crept along at the back, without inconveniencing anyone, for not a soul paid me any further attention. The company was in high spirits, fribbling and jesting, now and then speaking seriously of trifles, and often speaking triflingly of serious matters, and wit flowed with particular ease at the expense of absent friends and their affairs. I was too much a stranger there to understand much of all that, and too troubled and introspective to have a mind for such mysteries.

We had reached the rose grove. The lovely Fanny, seemingly the Queen of the Day, would insist on breaking a blossoming branch in person; she injured herself on a thorn, and crimson flowed, as if from

the dark roses, over her delicate hand. This accident set the entire company in motion. Court-plaster was sought. A silent, thin, gaunt, elongated, elderly man, who had been walking with the company but whom I had not yet noticed, at once put his hand into the tight tail-pocket of his old-fashioned coat of grey taffeta, brought forth a small wallet, opened it, and proffered the desired article to the lady with a lowly bow. She received it without paying any attention to the giver and without a word of thanks; the wound was bound, and everyone walked further up the hill, intending, from its crest, to enjoy a far-reaching prospect over the green labyrinth of the park towards the immeasurable ocean.

The sight was indeed immense and splendid. A light speck appeared on the horizon, between the dark water and the blue of the sky. "A telescope here!" cried John, and even before the servants who appeared at his call could set about their task, the grey man, bowing humbly, had put his hand in his coat-pocket, pulled out a handsome Dollond<sup>1</sup>, and presented it to Mr John. The latter, straightaway raising this to his eye, informed the company: it was the ship that had set sail on the previous day and was detained in sight of the harbour by contrary winds. The telescope passed from hand to hand, but not back to that of the owner; while I looked at the man in amazement, not understanding how the large apparatus had emerged from the tiny pocket. This enigma did not, however, seem to have struck any of the company, and they concerned themselves no more with the grey man than with me.

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<sup>1</sup> An achromatic telescope, named after its inventor John Dollond (1706-61).

Refreshments were now served, the rarest fruits from every zone in the most sumptuous vessels. Mr John did the honneurs with an easy grace, and directed some words towards me for the second time: "Eat this; you did not have it at sea." I bowed; but he did not see, he was already talking to another.

The party wished to lie down on the grass of the hill-slope, faces turned towards the unrolled landscape, but it shied away from the dampness of the earth. It would be divine here, someone opined, if one had Turkish carpets to spread out. Hardly had the wish been expressed when the man in the grey coat had his hand in his pocket and, with a modest, even humble demeanour, endeavoured to pull out a rich Turkish carpet interwoven with gold thread. The servants took receipt of it as a matter of course, and they unfolded it over the appointed location. The company seated itself on the carpet without fuss; I, on the other hand, looked in consternation at the man, the pocket, and the carpet, which measured more than twenty paces in length and ten in breadth, and I rubbed my eyes, not knowing what to make of this, especially as no one else found there to be anything strange.

I would gladly have had some information on the man, and inquired who he was, only I knew not to whom to apply; for I almost feared the Gentlemen Servants more than the Gentlemen Served. At last I took heart and walked up to a young man who seemed to me to be of less consequence than the others, and who had on occasion been standing alone. I quietly asked him to tell me who the obliging gentleman was, over there in the grey coat.

“The one who looks like an end of yarn? which has just escaped from a tailor’s needle?”

“Yes, who is standing on his own.”

“I don’t know him,” he gave by way of reply; and to avoid a longer conversation with me, as it seemed, he turned away, to speak of indifferent matters with another.

The sun now began to shine more strongly, and it became a burden to the ladies; the lovely Fanny carelessly asked the grey man, whom, as far as I knew, no one had yet addressed, the frivolous question: if he did not perhaps also have a tent about him? He responded with so deep a bow, as if an undeserved honour had been vouchsafed him, and there was his hand in his pocket, from which I saw canvas, poles, guy-ropes, ironwork – in short, everything belonging to the most splendid marquee – issuing forth. The young gentlemen helped to pitch it, and it covered the whole expanse of the carpet – and still no one found anything extraordinary in all this.

I had long felt uneasy, even horrified; and how utterly was this feeling intensified when, on the next wish spoken, I saw him pull out of that pocket three mounts – I’m telling you, three handsome, large black steeds with saddles and bridles! Just imagine, for Heaven’s sake! three saddled horses out of that same pocket from which a wallet, a telescope, an embroidered carpet twenty paces long and ten broad, a marquee of the same dimensions with all the requisite poles and iron fittings, had already come to light!

If I did not aver my having seen this with my own two eyes, you would certainly not believe it. –

However embarrassed and humble the man appeared to be, however little attention the others conferred on him, his pale appearance, from which I could not avert my eyes, curdled my blood until I could bear it no longer.

I resolved to steal away from the company; judging from the insignificant role I played in it, this appeared an easy task. I intended to return to the town and, on the following morning, try my luck with Mr. John again and – if I could summon the courage – question him about the strange grey man.

Would that Fortune had smiled on my escape!

Now I had safely crept through the rose-grove, down the hill, and I found myself on an open plain, when the fear of being met walking off the beaten path, over the grass, led me to throw a searching look around. – What a shock I received when I beheld the man in the grey coat behind, and heading straight towards me. He at once raised his hat to me and bowed lower than anyone had ever done to me before. There was no doubt that he wished to have a word, and I could not, without being ill-mannered, avoid this. I raised my hat too, returned his bow, and stood there rooted to the spot, bare-headed in the sun. I stared at him in blank fear, like a bird a snake has spellbound. He himself seemed very embarrassed; he did not lift his gaze, he bowed several times, stepped closer, and then addressed me with a soft, uncertain voice, roughly in the tone of a beggar.

“May Sir excuse my intrusiveness, if I dare to approach him while being such a stranger; I have a favour to ask. If you would be so kind as to grant – ”

“But for God’s sake, Sir!” I burst out in my fear, “what can I do for a man, who –” We both hesitated and, I think, turned red.

After a moment of silence he found his tongue again: “During the short time in which I have enjoyed the good fortune of finding myself in your vicinity, I have, Sir, on several occasions – permit me to say this to you – indeed been able to regard, with unutterable admiration, the beautiful, beautiful shadow you cast from yourself in the sun with, as it were, a certain noble contempt, without heeding it in the least: the beautiful shadow there at your feet. Forgive me this admittedly audacious presumption. I suppose you would not be averse to letting me have this shadow of yours?”

He fell silent, and my head was turning like a mill-wheel. What was I to make of the extraordinary request to buy my shadow off me? He must be mad, I thought; and in an altered tone, more appropriate to the humility of his, I replied thus:

“Well, well! my good friend, and does your own shadow not suffice, then? That’s what I call a transaction of a quite peculiar kind.”

He at once exclaimed: “I have in my pocket much that might seem to the gentleman to be not entirely without worth; for this invaluable shadow I hold the highest price too little.”

Now a cold shudder ran through me, when I was reminded of the pocket, and I did not know how I could have called him *my good friend*. I began to speak again, seeking to rectify matters, if possible, with boundless courtesy.

“But Sir, forgive your most obedient servant. I think I do not understand your meaning terribly well; just how could I give my shadow – ”

He interrupted me: “I request your permission to be able to lift up this noble shadow, on this very spot, and put it in my pocket, that is all; let the way in which I do this be my concern. In return, as evidence of my gratitude to the gentleman, I give him the choice of all the treasures my pocket affords: real springing-root<sup>2</sup>, mandragora<sup>3</sup>, penny-changers<sup>4</sup>, thieves’ thalers<sup>5</sup>, the tablecloth of Roland’s squire<sup>6</sup>, a gallows-manikin<sup>7</sup> at any price you like; but that will certainly not be to your taste: better Fortunatus’s Wishing-Hat, newly restored to a hard-wearing state; also a Purse of Fortune, the same as his.”

“Fortunatus’s Purse,” I interrupted; and as great as my fear might be, he had captured my every sense with these words. I took a dizzy turn, and double-ducats glittered before my eyes.

“If Sir would please to inspect and make trial of this purse.” He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out, by two fine leather drawstrings, a moderately large, firmly-stitched purse of stout cordovan, which he then presented to me. I reached inside and drew out ten gold pieces – and another ten, then another ten, and another ten; I quickly held out my hand to him: “Done! it’s a deal, you have my shadow for the

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<sup>2</sup> *Springwurz*: a legendary creature who lives in hollow trees and possesses the ability to open all doors and burst all locks.

<sup>3</sup> *Alraunwurz*: a plant extremely difficult to locate, which bestows on its possessor an especial skill in the procurement of treasure.

<sup>4</sup> *Wechselfennige*: copper-coins which produce a gold piece when flipped.

<sup>5</sup> *Raubtaler*: thalers which always return to their master, bringing with them every coin they have touched.

<sup>6</sup> A wishing-tablecloth.

<sup>7</sup> An obedient and giving devil in a bottle. He is bought, but must be sold for a lesser price; his last owner, who cannot sell him – the price being now too low –, becomes his.

purse." He shook my hand, knelt down in front of me without delay, and I beheld him, with admirable dexterity, gently free my shadow, from the head down to the feet, from the grass, lift it up, roll it together, fold it, and finally tuck it into his pocket. He stood up, bowed before me one more time, and then withdrew into the rose-bushes, where I thought I heard him laughing, quietly, to himself. I held the purse fast by its strings; around me the earth was bathed in sunlight, and then all was dark inside my head.



## II.

I finally regained my senses and hastened to leave this place where I, it was to be hoped, had no further business. First I filled my pockets with gold, then I tied the purse-strings round my neck and hid the purse in my bosom. I walked unnoticed out of the park, reached the high road, and made my way to the town. As I approached the gate,

deep in thought, I heard someone behind me crying: “Young sir! Hey! Young sir! Listen to me!”

I looked around; an old woman was shouting after me: “Sir should take care, he has lost his shadow.”

“Thanks, little mother!” I threw her a gold piece for her well-meant advice and stepped under the trees.

No sooner was I at the gate than I heard, from the sentry, “Where has Sir left his shadow?”, and directly afterwards from a couple of women: “Jesus Maria! the poor man has no shadow!” This began to vex me, and I took close care to avoid walking in the sun. But this was not possible everywhere; not, for example, in Broad Street, which I had to cross; and, disastrously for me, I had to cross at the very hour in which young boys were pouring out of school. A damned hunchbacked rascal – I can see him yet – was on to my missing shadow at once. He gave me away with lusty yells to all the literary street arabs of the suburb, who immediately began to recense me and pelt me with mud: “Proper people tend to take their shadows along when they walk in the sun.” To fend them off, I threw heaped handfuls of gold in their midst; then I sprang into a cab with the assistance of some compassionate souls.

As soon as I found myself alone in the rolling carriage, I began to weep bitterly. The suspicion had by now begun to mount inside me that, as much as gold outweighs merit and virtue on this earth, by so much more is one’s shadow valued above gold; and as I had previously sacrificed riches to my conscience, so had I now surrendered my shadow for mere gold – what was to, what on earth must, become of me!

I was still deeply perturbed, when the coach halted in front of my old inn; the thought of walking into that squalid garret alarmed me. I had my things brought down, received the shabby bundle with contempt, threw down a few pieces of gold, and gave the order to drive up to the most exclusive hotel. The building faced north; I did not have to fear the sun. I dismissed the coachman with gold, had myself shown to the best rooms, and locked myself in as soon as I had the chance.

What do you think I did now? – Oh, my dear Chamisso, confessing this, even to you, makes me blush. I pulled the luckless purse from my breast, and with a kind of rage which fanned itself inside me like a furious conflagration, I drew out gold, and gold, and gold, and ever more gold, and strewed the stone floor with it, and walked over it, and made it clink; and feasting my poor heart on its glitter, on its sound, I added ever more metal to the pile, until I sank down exhausted on the rich hoard, wallowing in it, rolling over it. So passed the day, the evening; I did not unlock my door, night found me lying on the gold, and then sleep overcame me.

Then I dreamt of you: it seemed that I was standing behind the glass doors of your little chamber, from where I could see you sitting at your desk between a skeleton and a bunch of dried plants; Haller<sup>8</sup>, Humboldt<sup>9</sup> and Linné<sup>10</sup> lay open before you, and on your sofa lay a volume of Goethe and the 'Zauberring'<sup>11</sup>; I looked at you for a long time, and at every object in your study, and then at you again; but you did not stir, you did not even draw breath, – you were dead.

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<sup>8</sup> Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777), Swiss doctor and botanist: *Bibliotheca botanica* 1771/2.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), German naturalist and explorer.

<sup>10</sup> Carl von Linné (1707-1778), Swedish botanist, founder of binary system of classification.

I woke up. It seemed to be yet very early. My watch had stopped. I was worn out and aching, and thirsty and hungry as well; I had eaten nothing since the previous morning. Full of indignation and aversion, I pushed away the gold with which I had, a short while before, satiated my foolish heart; now, in my morose frame of mind, I did not know what to begin with it. It could not remain lying there – I tested if the purse would swallow it back down – No. None of my windows opened over the sea. I had to force myself to drag it, laboriously and with sour sweat, to a large chest in a closet, and to pack it inside. I left only a few handfuls lying. When I had finished my labour, I sank down, exhausted, into an easy chair and waited for the house-servants to start stirring. As soon as it was possible, I ordered food to be brought and summoned the hotelier.

I discussed the future arrangements of my household with this man. He recommended to me, for service to my person, a certain Bendel, whose honest and sensible physiognomy won me over at once. It was this man whose devotion accompanied and consoled me, from that time, on through the misery of life, helping me to endure my dismal lot. I spent the whole day in my rooms with servants in want of a situation, with cobblers, tailors and merchants; I bought furnishings and a particularly large amount of precious objects and jewels, just to rid myself of some of the accumulated gold; but it really did not seem that the pile could ever diminish.

Meanwhile, my mind floated in the most alarming doubts over my condition. I could not venture a step out of my door; and in the evening

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<sup>11</sup> A novel of romance (1813) by Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (1777-1843).

I had forty wax candles lit in my hall before I emerged from the darkness. I recalled with horror the terrible scene with the schoolboys. I resolved, however much courage it required, to sound public opinion once again. –

The nights were moonlit at that time. Late in the evening I threw a wide cloak around me, pressed my hat down low over my eyes, and crept, trembling like a criminal, out of the house. Not until I had reached a remote square did I step out of the shadow of the houses, under whose cover I had come this far, into the moonlight; composed to hear my fate from the mouths of passers-by.

Spare me, my dear friend, the painful recital of all that I had to endure. The women often gave indications of the deep pity with which I filled them – remarks that pierced my soul no less than the mockery of youths and the arrogant contempt of men, especially of those fat, portly ones who cast a broad shadow before them. A beautiful, graceful maiden, apparently accompanying her parents, turned her shining eyes on me, quite by chance, while they were pensively staring before their feet; she visibly started as she noticed my shadowlessness, covered her beautiful countenance with her veil, hung down her head, and walked silently past.

I could bear it no longer. Salt streams burst from my eyes, and with a rended heart I withdrew, tottering, into the darkness. I had to cling on to walls to steady my steps, and it was slowly and late that I reached my dwelling.

I spent a sleepless night. On the following day my first concern was to have the man in the grey coat sought everywhere. Perhaps I

should succeed in finding him again, and what joy! if he, like I, should rue the foolish transaction. I sent for Bendel, for he seemed to possess adroitness and ability. I gave him an exact description of the man in whose possession lay a treasure, without which my life was sheer agony. I told him the time, the place where I had seen this man, described everyone who had been present, and added this indication: he was to make particular inquiries after a Dollond telescope, a Turkish carpet interwoven with gold thread, a marquee, and finally some black stallions, the history of all which was tied together, in an as yet undetermined way, with that of the mysterious man, who had seemed insignificant to everyone and whose appearance had destroyed the peace and happiness of my life.

When I had finished speaking, I fetched some gold, as great a load as I was able to bear, and added gems and jewels to increase the value. "Bendel," I said, "this smooths many a path, and makes easy much that seemed impossible; be not sparing with it, as I am not, but go and gladden your master with the news on which all of his hopes rest."

He went. It was late when he came sadly back. Not one of Mr. John's servants, not one of his guests – he had spoken to all – could even vaguely recall the man in the grey coat. The new telescope was there, and no one knew where it had come from; the carpet and the marquee were still spread out and pitched on the hill, the servants extolled their master's wealth, and none knew whence these new valuables had come to him. As for the master, he took pleasure in them, and not knowing whence he had them caused him no concern. The horses were now in the stalls of the young gentlemen who had ridden them; these praised

the generosity of Mr. John, who had gifted them the steeds that day. So much was manifest from the detailed account given by Bendel, whose ready zeal and sensible conduct, even after so fruitless an outcome, merited and received my praise. I gloomily signalled to him to leave me on my own.

“I have,” he resumed, “made a report to my master about the matter that was of greatest import to him. It remains for me to deliver a message that was given me early today by a person I met before the door, as I was departing on that commission in which I have been so unfortunate. The man’s words were precisely these: ‘Tell Mr. Peter Schlemihl that he will see me here no more, as I am going over the sea; and a favourable wind is, even now, calling me to port. But after a year and a day, I shall have the honour to seek him out and propose another transaction which may be to his advantage. Convey to him my humblest respects, and assure him of my gratitude’. I asked him who he was; he simply replied that you knew him.”

“What did the man look like?” I cried, full of foreboding. And Bendel described to me the man in the grey coat, feature by feature, word for word, as he had faithfully depicted him in his previous account of the man he was inquiring after.

“Unhappy man!” I cried, wringing my hands, “it was *he* himself!” and the scales fell from his eyes.

“Yes, it was he, really he!” he cried out in alarm, “and like a blind man, like an idiot, I didn’t recognise him, didn’t recognise him, and I’ve betrayed my master!”

With hot tears, he broke out into the bitterest self-reproaches, and the despair in which he found himself could not but fill me with compassion. I spoke comforting words, repeatedly assured him that I entertained no doubts of his fidelity, and sent him directly to the harbour to, if possible, follow the strange man's trail. But on that particular morning a great number of ships, which contrary winds had detained in port, had put to sea, all to different points of the compass, all bound for different coasts; and the grey man had disappeared without trace – like a shadow.

### III.

What help would wings be to a man bound fast in iron fetters? He has still to despair, and all the more dreadfully. I lay, like Fafnir on his hoard, far from human conversation, starving with my gold; but I did not have a heart for it, indeed I cursed that metal for the sake of which I saw myself severed from mankind. Harboured my dismal secret alone, I feared the lowest of my servants, whom I could not but envy at the same time; for he had a shadow, he could show himself in the sun. I moped away the lonely days and nights in my rooms, and grief tugged at my heart.

Another pined away before my eyes: my faithful Bendel ceased not to torture himself with silent reproaches for having betrayed his gracious master's trust and for not having recognised the man he had been sent out to seek, and with whom he could not but imagine my miserable fate to be closely intertwined. But I could lay no blame on him; I recognised, in that occurrence, the stranger's fabulous nature.

To leave nothing untried, I once sent Bendel with a valuable diamond ring to the most famous artist in town, whom I invited to pay me a visit. He came; I ordered my servants away, locked the door, sat down with the man, and after I had praised his art I came with heavy heart to the point, having first made him swear the strictest secrecy.

“Sir,” I began, “could you by any chance paint, for a man who has lost his shadow in the most unfortunate way in the world, a false shadow?”

“You mean a human shadow?”

“That is certainly what I mean.”

“But,” he asked further, “through what clumsiness, through what carelessness, could he have lost his own shadow?”

“How it came about,” I replied, “is neither here nor there; but this much – ” I lied brazenly to him:- “In Russia, where he was on a journey last winter, an extraordinarily cold snap froze his shadow so tightly to the ground that he was unable to work it loose.”

“The false sheet shadow I could paint for him,” the artist replied, “would only be such a one as he would lose again with the slightest motion – especially so for a man who kept such a weak hold on his own innate shadow as can be ascertained from your tale; let he who has no shadow not walk in the sun, that is the safest and most sensible course.” Then he stood up and took his leave, while fixing me with a piercing look that my eyes could not bear. I sank back into my armchair and hid my face in my hands.

Thus did Bendel find me on entering. He saw his master’s pain and intended to withdraw quietly and deferentially. – I looked up – I

succumbed to the weight of my sorrow; I had to tell him. "Bendel," I called to him, "Bendel! you, the only man who sees and honours my tribulations, wanting not to inquire into them, but to quietly and devotedly sympathise – come to me, Bendel, and be neighbour to my heart. I have not closed my wealth of gold to you; I shall not close to you my wealth of grief. – Bendel, don't forsake me. Bendel, you see me rich, generous, gracious; you imagine the world should extol me, and you see me shun the world and lock myself away from it. Bendel, it has passed judgement, the world, and disowned me; and you too will perhaps turn from me, when you learn my dreadful secret: Bendel, I am rich, generous, gracious, but – oh God! – I have no shadow!" –

"No shadow?" the good youth cried out in alarm, and bright tears streamed from his eyes. – "Woe is me for being born to serve a shadowless master!" He fell silent, and I held my face in my hands. –

"Bendel," I said at last, with trembling voice, "now you have my confidence; now you can betray it. Go forth and bear witness against me."

He seemed to be in a violent struggle with himself; in the end he threw himself down before me and grasped my hand, which he bathed with his tears. "No," he cried, "let the world think what it may, I can and will not abandon my gracious master for the sake of a shadow, I shall do the right thing, not the wise one, I shall stay by you, lend you my shadow, help you where I can, and weep with you where I cannot." I flung my arms around his neck, amazed at such an unfamiliar cast of mind; for I was convinced that he was not doing this for the sake of gold.

From that moment on, my fate and my way of life changed somewhat. Words cannot describe the precautionary care with which Bendel was able to conceal my affliction. He was ever before and with me, foreseeing everything, making provision, and, where danger suddenly threatened, swiftly covering me with his own shadow; for he was taller and stouter than I. So I ventured out among mankind again and began to play a role in the world. Admittedly, I had to assume many ostensible idiosyncrasies and caprices. But these suit the rich man admirably, and as long as the truth remained hidden, I enjoyed all the honour and respect that gold may command. I awaited with greater peace of mind the visit that the mysterious stranger had promised for a year and a day.

I felt all too keenly that I must not stay long in a place where I had been seen without a shadow, and where I could easily be betrayed; I also still thought – perhaps I was alone in so doing – of the figure I had cut before Mr. John, and the memory weighed heavily on my mind; accordingly I wanted to merely make a trial run here, in order to be able to appear with greater ease and confidence elsewhere – yet something occurred which held me there for a time by my vanity; that is the part of a man where the anchor grips most certain ground.

It was the beautiful Fanny, whom I met once again on neutral territory, who gifted me – without recalling ever having seen me – some attention; for now I had intellect and wit. When I spoke, people listened; I myself did not know how I had attained the art of conversing so easily and with such mastery. The impression I saw I had made on the belle made of me just what she desired – a fool – and I followed her

with a thousand exertions through shadows and twilight, wherever I could. I was simply vain about making *her* vain about having *me*, and with the best will in the world, I was unable to force the thrill out of my head and into my heart.

But why repeat this most commonplace of stories to you in all its length and breadth? – You yourself have told me it often enough of other people of rank. In addition to the old, well-known play, in which I good-naturedly accepted a hackneyed role, there came a specially-composed catastrophe, not expected by me, or her, or anyone.

When, one fine evening, I had assembled a company in a garden, as was my wont, I went for a stroll arm-in-arm with my lady at some distance from the other guests, endeavouring to turn some fine-sounding phrases for her ears. She looked down demurely before her and gently returned the pressure of my hand, when, all of a sudden, the moon emerged from clouds at our back – and she saw only her own shadow falling down before us. She started, and looked at me in consternation, then back at the earth, desiring my shadow with her eyes; and all that was passing through her mind was reflected so strangely in the expressions of her face, that I could have burst out into loud laughter, had a chill not coursed up my spine.

I let her fall from my arms in a faint, shot like an arrow through the horrified guests, reached the gate, threw myself into the first carriage I found waiting there, and travelled back to the city, where I had left the cautious Bendel – disastrously so, on this occasion. He gave a start when he saw me; *one* word discovered everything. Post-horses were sent for on the spot. I took only one of my servants with me, a

cunning rogue by the name of Rascal, whose adroitness had made him necessary to me and who could have suspected nothing of the day's occurrence. I covered thirty miles that same night. Bendel stayed behind to dissolve my household, to settle my accounts, and then to bring along what was most necessary. When he caught up on the following day, I threw myself into his arms and swore to him, not to commit no further acts of folly, but just to be more prudent in future. We continued our journey over mountains, and over the border, without a break; and only on the far slope, separated by the lofty bulwark from that fateful land, did I allow myself to be moved to rest away, in a nearby, little-frequented spa, the toils I had endured.



#### IV.

In my story I shall now have to rush through a time on which I would – how dearly – like to linger, if I were capable of evoking its living

spirit in my memory. But the colour that animated it, and which alone can revive it, has faded inside me; and when I want to rediscover in my breast all that it raised so powerfully at that time – the pains, the happiness, the docile delusion –, then I beat in vain against a rock that affords a living spring no longer, and God has receded from me. How differently it now looks at me, this bygone time!

There, in the spa, I was to tragediate a hero's role; poorly rehearsed, and a greenhorn on the stage, I gawp myself out of the drama and into a pair of blue eyes. The parents, disappointed with the play, work with might and main to quickly clinch the deal, and ridicule winds up the low farce. And that is all, all!

This seems silly and fatuous to me; but it is also dreadful that what, at that time, swelled my breast with such fullness and greatness can now seem so. Mina, as I wept when I lost you, so do I weep now at having lost you inside me. Am I then become so old? – Oh sorry reason! Just a pulse-beat of that time, a moment more of that delusion – but no! I float lonely on the high, desolate sea of your bitter tide, long since having lost the spark and fizz of the final goblet of '11 Champagne!<sup>12</sup>

I had sent Bendel ahead with some sacks of gold to arrange an appropriate dwelling. He had scattered a great deal of money there and expressed himself in rather vague terms concerning the noble stranger he served – for I did not wish to be named. This brought the good people to strange thoughts. As soon as my house was ready to receive me, Bendel returned to convey me thither. We set out on our journey.

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<sup>12</sup> 1811: year of a comet and an extremely good vintage!

Roughly an hour before the place, on a sunny plain, our way was barred by a crowd, arrayed in festive adornment. The coach halted. Music could be heard, bells were pealed, cannons fired, and a loud *vivat* rang through the air – before the carriage door there appeared a chorus of maidens, garbed in white, of exceptional beauty; but who were eclipsed by *one* of their number like the stars of night by the sun. She stepped out from the midst of her companions; the tall, delicate form knelt down before me, shyly blushing, and held out to me a garland woven of laurel, olive-branches and roses, on a silk cushion, speaking all the while some words about majesty, reverence and love that I did not understand; yet her enchanting silver tones enraptured my ear and my heart – I felt as if this heavenly vision had flowed past me once before. The chorus joined in, and sang the praise of a good King and the happiness of his subjects.

And this scene, my dear friend, in the open sunlight! She remained kneeling two paces before me, and I, without a shadow, could not jump the chasm, could not fall down on my knees before the angelic being. Oh, what would I not have given at that moment for a shadow! I had to conceal my shame, my fear, my despair, in the dark depths of the carriage. Eventually Bendel took thought for me and leapt out of the other side of the carriage; I called him back and gave him, from the casket I had at hand, a rich diamond coronet, which had been meant to adorn the lovely Fanny. He stepped forward and spoke on behalf of his master, who neither could nor would accept such attestations of honour; a mistake must be at work here; nevertheless, the worthy townspeople were to be thanked for their kind intention. In the

meantime, he took the proffered garland from its place and laid the circlet of diamonds in its stead; then he respectfully offered the beautiful maiden his hand to arise and, with a wave, dismissed the clergy, the town-council, and all the deputations. No one was admitted from this point on. He ordered the crowd to part and make way for the horses, then vaulted back into the carriage; and off we went at full gallop, through arches built of foliage and flowers, towards the little town.

The cannons were still being fired with gay abandon. The coach halted in front of my house; I nimbly sprang through the doors, parting the crowd that had been called together by the desire to see me. The mob shouted *vivat* under my window, and I showered them with double-ducats. That evening the whole town was illuminated.

And I still did not know what all this was meant to signify, or who they took me to be. I sent Rascal out to reconnoitre. He was told how the definite information had been received that the good King of Prussia was travelling through the land under the name of some count; how my aide-de-camp had been recognised and had given himself and me away; finally, how great the people's joy was at the certainty of having me in their town. They did, admittedly, realise how great had been their error in lifting the veil so intrusively, when I clearly wished to observe the strictest incognito. But I had raged so gracefully, so graciously – I would surely have to pardon their well-meaning hearts.

This business struck my scoundrel as so droll that he did his utmost, with reproachful phrases, to temporarily confirm the good people in their belief. He delivered a very comical report, and when he

saw how this amused me, he thought to entertain me through the performance of his knaveries. – Must I own the truth? You see, I was flattered to be taken, no matter how, for the revered Head of State.

I ordered a banquet to be prepared for the evening of the morrow, under the trees that shaded the ground in front of my house, and I had the whole town invited. The mysterious power of my purse, Bendel's exertions, and Rascal's ready inventiveness, succeeded in conquering time itself. It is really astonishing, how everything fell into such lavish and beautiful order in just a few hours – the splendour and the abundance, which were there on display! Moreover, the ingenious lighting was deployed so wisely that I felt perfectly at ease. Nothing had been left to my memory; I had to praise my servants.

The evening grew dark. The guests arrived and were introduced to me. No mention was made of His Majesty; I was called, in deep reverence and humility: Count. What could I do? I let the name pass and became, from that hour on, Count Peter. In the midst of the festive throng my soul desired only *one*. She appeared late, she who was and wore the crown. Demurely following her parents, she did not seem to know that she was the most beautiful of all. The First Commissioner of Forests, his wife, and daughter, were introduced to me. I knew how to make many pleasant and obliging remarks to the parents; before the daughter, I stood like a tongue-lashed schoolboy, unable to babble out a word. At length I requested her, stammering, to dignify this banquet, by holding in it that office whose symbol she adorned. She shyly asked, with a touching look, to be spared; but more embarrassed than she herself, I brought her, as her premier subject, my homage with the

deepest reverence; and the Count's sign became a precept for all the guests, which every one of them joyfully endeavoured to follow. Majesty, innocence and grace, in union with beauty, presided over a joyful festivity. Mina's happy parents believed their child exalted in honour of themselves; I myself was in a rapture beyond words. I had all the jewels that remained from those I had bought to be rid of my burdensome gold – all the pearls, all the gems – placed in two covered dishes and, in the name of the Queen, passed round at table to her playmates and all the ladies; and all this while, gold was thrown over the raised barriers and among the cheering mob.

On the following morning, Bendel disclosed to me, in confidence, that the suspicion he had long harboured against Rascal's honesty was now become certainty: on the previous day, he had misappropriated sacks full of gold. "Let us," I replied, "not begrudge the poor knave this trifling haul; I willingly give out to all, why not to him as well? Yesterday he, yesterday all the new servants you have given me, served me honourably, they joyfully helped me to create a joyful feast."

The subject was not brought up again. Rascal remained the first of my servants, whereas Bendel was my friend and confidant. The latter had grown accustomed to regard my wealth as inexhaustible, and he did not seek its source; he rather helped me, understanding my mind, devise constant occasions of display and expenditure. Of that stranger, the pale creeper, he knew only this: that through him alone could I be delivered from the curse that weighed me down, and that I feared the man on whom reposed my solitary hope. Incidentally, I was convinced

that he could find me anywhere, I him nowhere; therefore I had, awaiting the promised day, put an end to all futile searches.

The magnificence of my banquet, and my demeanour on the occasion, initially maintained the credulous townspeople in their preconceived belief. It certainly came to light in no time at all, through the newspapers, that the King of Prussia's fabulous journey had been nothing more than an unfounded rumour; but a King I was, and a King I absolutely had to remain, and one of the richest and most regal there could ever be. It was just that nobody really knew which one. The world has never had cause to complain of a lack of monarchs, at least in our days; the good people, who had never yet clapped eyes on a King, guessed, with equal success, now at this one, now at that one – and Count Peter remained the same man.

There once appeared, among the visitors to the spa, a merchant who had become a bankrupt in order to enrich himself, who enjoyed universal respect, and who cast a wide, if somewhat pale, shadow. He intended to make a sumptuous show here of the fortune he had accumulated, and he even entered upon the notion of competing with me. I had recourse to my purse, and in next to no time I had driven him to the point where, to save his reputation, he had to declare himself bankrupt once again, then make his way over the mountains. Thus did I shake him off. – I made many good-for-nothings and idlers in this region!

For all the regal splendour and magnificence with which I subjugated everyone, I led a very simple and secluded life in my house. I had made it a rule to observe the greatest caution; none but Bendel was

permitted, on any pretence, to enter the room I occupied. As long as the sun shone, I stayed locked inside with him, and the word went out: the Count has business in his cabinet. The couriers I frequently sent out and received, for each and any trifle, were connected with this business.

I accepted company only in the evening under my trees, or in my hall, which was skilfully and brilliantly illuminated after Bendel's instructions. When I went out, Bendel having to constantly guard me Argus-eyed, then it was only to the Forestry Commissioner's garden and for the sake of *one*; for my love was the innermost spirit of my life.

Oh, my good Chamisso, I will hope you have not yet forgotten what love is! I shall leave much here for you to supplement. Mina was truly a loveable, good, and pious maiden. I had bound her entire imagination to me; in her humility, she did not know how she was worthy of my having eyes only for her, but she requited love for love with the full youthful fervour of an innocent heart. She loved like a woman; sacrificing her whole being, forgetful of herself, devotedly thinking only of he who was her life, careless though she should perish; in a word, she truly loved. –

And I – oh, what terrible hours – terrible! and yet worthy of my wishing their return – I often cried my eyes out on Bendel's breast when, after the first, unconscious rapture, I came to my senses and had a sharp look at myself: I, who, without a shadow, corrupting this angel with pernicious egoism, had lied and stolen my way to possession of her pure soul! Then I decided to betray my secret to her in person; then I swore solemn oaths to tear myself away from her, to flee from her; then I burst

into another volley of tears, and made arrangements with Bendel to visit her in the Forester's garden that evening.

At other times I lied to myself, alleging great expectations from the grey stranger's imminent visit, and I wept once more when my efforts to believe them proved vain. I had calculated the day on which I expected to meet the dreadful figure again; for he had said, *in a year and a day*, and I believed his word.

The parents were good, respectable old people, who loved their only child very much; the whole affair had taken them by surprise, and they did not know what to do. Previously, they had not dreamed that Count Peter could even bestow a thought on their child; now he actually loved her, and was loved in return. –The mother was certainly vain enough to consider the possibility of a connection, and to work towards this end; the old man's sound human understanding gave no room to such extravagant illusions. Both were convinced of the purity of my love – they could do nothing but pray for their child.

My hand finds a letter from Mina, a remnant of that time. – Yes, those are her strokes! I shall transcribe it for you.

“I'm a weak, foolish girl, I could delude myself that my lover, because I love him deeply, deeply, would not want to hurt a poor girl. – Ah, You are so good, so inexpressibly good; but do not misinterpret my words. You are not to sacrifice anything for me, or to want to sacrifice anything for me; oh God! I could hate myself if You did that. No – You have made me terribly happy, You have taught me how to love. Go hence! – For my fate knows that Count Peter does not belong to me, he belongs to the world; I'll be proud when I hear: he has been this, and he

was that, and he has accomplished this; they have worshipped him here, and they have idolised him there. You see, when I think this, I am angry with You, that You could forget Your high destiny at the side of a simple child. – Go hence, or the thought will yet make me unhappy, I who am, ah! so happy, so blissfully happy through You. Have I not also woven an olive-branch and rosebud into Your life, as into the garland I was to present You with? I have You in my heart, beloved; have no fear about going from me – I’ll die, ah! so blissful, so inexpressibly blissful because of You.” –

You can imagine how these words pierced my heart. I explained to her that I was not what people seemed to take me to be; I was only a rich, but endlessly miserable, man. There lay a curse on me, which should be the solitary secret between the two of us, for I was not yet without hope that it would be lifted. This was the poison of my days: the thought that I might sweep her off her feet into the abyss with me, she who was the only light, the only joy, the only heart of my life. Then she wept again because I was unhappy. Oh, she was so loving, so good! To buy me just a tear, she would – with what supreme happiness – have sacrificed her body and soul.

Meanwhile she was far from interpreting my words correctly; she now suspected me to be some Prince whom a heavy sentence had struck – some high, proscribed head of state – and her imagination assiduously painted her loved one in heroic scenes.

One day I said to her: “Mina, the last day of next month can change and decide my fate – if this does not happen, then I must die, for I will not make you unhappy.” She buried her face, weeping, in my breast.

“If your fate changes, let me but know that you are happy, I have no claim to you. – If you are miserable, bind me to your misery, so I may help you to bear it.”

“Girl, girl, take them back, these rash, these foolish words that escaped from your lips – and do you know it, this misery, do you know it, this curse? Do you know who your beloved - - what he - ? – Don’t you see how I shudder convulsively, that I have a secret from you?”

She fell sobbing at my feet and, swearing vows, repeated her petition.

I declared myself to the Forestry Commissioner as he walked in: it was my intention to ask for his daughter’s hand in marriage on the first day of the month after next. – I set this time because much might happen in the interval that could influence my fate. But my love for his daughter was unwavering. –

It gave the good man a real shock to hear such words from the mouth of Count Peter. He flung his arms around my neck, then blushed deeply at having forgotten himself. It now occurred to him to doubt, to consider and to probe; he spoke of a dowry, of security, of the future for his beloved child. I thanked him for reminding me of all this. I told him that I wished to settle down in this area, where I seemed to be loved, and to lead a life free from care. I requested that he purchase, in his daughter’s name, the most handsome estates up for sale in the land and direct the bill to my door. A father would best serve the lover of his child by this. – This gave him much to do, for he was always second to a stranger; and he bought for no less than a million.

My keeping him occupied with this was, at bottom, an innocent ruse to keep him at a distance, and I had already used similar ones, for I must confess that he was somewhat tiresome. The good mother, on the other hand, was rather deaf, and not, like him, jealous of the honour of entertaining the Count.

The mother joined us, the happy people urged me to spend more of the evening with them; I could not tarry one minute longer: I could see the rising moon on the twilight horizon. – My time was up. –

On the following evening I went to the Commissioner's garden again. I had thrown a cloak far over my shoulders and pressed my hat low over my eyes. When I walked up to Mina, she raised her eyes and, catching sight of me, made an instinctive movement: and there, clear before my soul, was once again the vision of that abysmal night when I showed myself without a shadow in the moonlight. It was indeed she! But had she now recognised me as well? She was silent and thoughtful – a weight like an anvil lay on my breast – I rose from my seat. She threw herself silently weeping on my bosom. I left.

And now I frequently found her in tears; all became darker and darker around my soul – while the parents floated in blissful effusions; the fateful day approached, foreboding and stifling as a thundercloud. The eve was here – I could barely breathe. As a precaution, I had filled several chests with gold; I awaited the twelfth hour.

It struck.

And there I sat, my eyes fixed on the hands of the clock, counting the seconds, the minutes, like dagger thrusts. At every sound that stirred, I started up; day broke. The leaden hours displaced one

another; it was midday, evening, night; the hands moved on, hope wilted; eleven struck, and nothing appeared; the last minutes of the last hour fell, still nothing appeared; the first stroke, the last stroke of the twelfth hour struck, and I sank despairingly back, into my bed, with tears unending. That day I was – shadowless for ever – to ask for my loved one’s hand; an anxious sleep, towards morning, shuttered my eyes.



## V.

It was yet early when I was woken by voices raised in a violent exchange in my anteroom. I pricked up my ears. – Bendel forbade my door; Rascal solemnly swore that he would take no orders from the likes of him and insisted on forcing his way into my chamber. The faithful Bendel admonished him that such words, if they came to my ears, would

bring him out of a profitable service. Rascal threatened to lay hands on him if he barred the entrance any longer.

I had half-dressed; I furiously flung the door open and went for Rascal. "Villain, what do you want -".

He stepped back three paces and coldly replied: "To most humbly ask you, noble Count, to allow me, this once, the sight of your shadow - the sun is shining so brightly on the courtyard right now." -

I was thunderstruck. It was long before I could find my tongue again. - "How can a servant -"

He interrupted me perfectly calmly: "A servant may be a very honest man, and not wish to serve a shadowless master; I demand my discharge."

I had to change my tune. "But Rascal, dear Rascal, who has put this unhappy idea into your head? how can you imagine - -?"

He continued in the same tone: "People *will* claim that you have no shadow - and so, in short, you show me your shadow or give me my discharge."

Bendel, pale and trembling, but more collected than I, made me a sign; I sought refuge in the all-appeasing gold - that too had lost its power - he threw it down at my feet. "I take nothing from a shadowless man." And he turned his back on me and walked, hat on head, whistling a ditty, slowly out of the room. I stood there with Bendel, petrified, gazing after him without thought or motion.

Heaving heavy sighs, with death in my heart, I finally made my preparations to keep my word and appear, like a criminal before his judges, in the Commissioner's garden. I made my way down to the dark

arbour that bore my name, where they were to expect me. The mother came towards me light-heartedly and joyfully. Mina sat there, as pale and beautiful as the first fall of snow that kisses the last of the autumn flowers, then instantly melts away into bitter water. The Commissioner, a written sheet in his hand, was pacing vigorously up and down; and he seemed to be suppressing something important, hence the succession of flushes and blanches that flew over his normally immovable countenance. He came up to me as I entered and requested, breaking off many times, a word in private. The path down which he invited me to follow him led to an open, sunlit part of the garden – I sat down on a seat without saying a word, and there ensued a long silence that even the good mother did not dare to break.

The Commissioner continued to storm with unequal steps up and down the arbour; then he suddenly stopped before me, glanced at the paper he held in his hand, and asked me, with a searching look: “Can it be, noble Count, that a certain Peter Schlemihl is not indeed unknown to you?”

I remained silent.

“A man of excellent character and extraordinary gifts – ” He waited for a reply.

“And supposing I were that very man?”

“Who,” he added vehemently, “has lost possession of his shadow!”

“Oh, my forebodings, my forebodings!” cried Mina, “yes, I’ve long known it, he has no shadow!” And she threw herself into her shocked mother’s arms, who desperately held her tight and reproached her for having kept such a disastrous secret to herself. The daughter was, like

Arethusa, transformed into a spring of tears, which flowed with greater frequency at the sound of my voice and surged in storm at my approach.

“And you have,” the Commissioner wrathfully continued, “and you have, with unexampled impudence, not scrupled to deceive these ladies and me; and you profess to love her whom you have brought so low? See how she weeps and writhes. Oh awful, awful!” –

I had lost my presence of mind to such an extent that I began, dementedly: When all was said and done, a shadow was nought but a shadow, one could manage without it, and it did not merit the bother of raising such a commotion. But I felt the unreason of my words so strongly that I stopped of my own accord before he deigned to answer me. I further added: what one had lost in the past, one could recover in the future.

He shouted at me in a fury – “Confess to me, Sir, confess to me how you came out of your shadow?”

I was again compelled to lie: “One day a boor trod so barbarously on my shadow that he tore a great hole in it – I have merely given it out to be mended, for gold can work wonders; I was to have received it back yesterday, in fact.”

“Good, Sir, very good!” replied the Commissioner, “you want my daughter’s hand, so do others; as a father, I have to provide for her. I give you three days’ grace within which you may cast around for a shadow: if you appear before me within three days with a well-fitting shadow, then you will be welcome; on the fourth day, however – I tell you this – my daughter is the wife of another.”

I attempted to direct some words to Mina; but she clung, sobbing with greater violence, more closely to her mother, who silently beckoned me to leave. I staggered away and felt the world closing behind me.

Escaped from Bendel's caring supervision, I ran wildly through woods and over meadows. Cold sweat dripped from my brow, dull groans escaped my breast, and madness raged inside me.

I do not know how long this had lasted, when I felt someone tugging my sleeve on a sunny heath. -I stopped and looked around - - it was the man in the grey coat, who appeared to have run himself out of breath in pursuing me. He at once began:

"I had announced that I would visit today; you have not been able to wait for the time. But all is still well; you take counsel, you make an exchange for your shadow, which is at your disposal, and you turn back at once. You will be welcome in the Forester's garden, and everything will have been just a joke: Rascal, who betrayed you, and who is wooing your betrothed, I shall take to myself: the fellow is ready."

I stood there, as still as one in sleep. - "Announced a visit for today?" I thought over the time once again - he was right, I had been a day out in my calculations. My right hand sought the purse at my breast - he guessed my intention and took two steps back.

"No, Count, that is in more than capable hands; you keep it."

I stared at him blankly, astonished, enquiring; he went on: "I request merely a trifle, as a keepsake: Just be so good as to sign this memorandum for me."

On this parchment stood the words: 'By virtue of this signature of mine, I bequeath, to the bearer of this, my soul, after its natural separation from my body.'

I looked at the writing and the grey stranger, by turns, in silent amazement. – He had in the meantime caught a drop of blood, which a thorn had just ripped from my hand, with a newly-cut quill, and he held this out to me. –

“So who are you?” I asked him at last.

“What does it matter,” he said by way of reply, “and don't I look what I am? A poor devil, you could say a sort of scholar and physician, who harvests scanty thanks from his friends for his splendid skills, and whose only pleasure on this earth lies in his little bit of experimentation – but come, sign. On the right, down there: *Peter Schlemihl*.”

I shook my head and said: “Forgive me, Sir; I am not signing that.”

“Not?” he repeated, astonished, “and why not?” –

“Exchanging my soul for my shadow does seem to me to be, so to speak, alarming.” –

“So, so!” he repeated, “alarming”; and he burst out into ringing laughter at me. “And, if I may ask, what kind of a thing is it, your soul? Have you ever seen it, and what do you hope to begin with it once you are dead? You should be happy to have found an enthusiast who will pay you, during your lifetime, for the bequest of this X, this galvanic force or polarising agency or whatever the silly thing is supposed to be, with something actual, namely your living shadow, by virtue of which you can acquire your beloved's hand and achieve the fulfilment of your every wish. Or would you rather push the poor young thing towards

that despicable scoundrel, that Rascal, and surrender her to him, with your own hands? – No, you must see this with your own eyes; come, I shall lend you this cap of darkness” (he drew something from his pocket), “and we shall pilgrimage unseen to the Commissioner’s garden.”

I must confess that I was exceedingly ashamed to be the butt of this man’s laughter. I hated him from the bottom of my heart, and I believe that it was this personal antipathy, more than any principle or prejudice, that prevented me from purchasing my shadow – as necessary as it was to me – with the desired signature. Moreover, the thought of going on the walk that he proposed, in his company, was unbearable. Seeing this ugly creeper, this sneering goblin, scornfully stepping between me and my beloved – two torn and bleeding hearts – outraged my deepest feelings. I accepted what had happened as decreed, and my misery as unavoidable; and turning to the man, I said:

“Sir, I sold you my shadow for this most estimable purse, and I have repented my fill. Let the deal be reversed, in God’s name!”

He shook his head; his face darkened.

I continued: “In that case I shall sell you nothing further in my possession, even if the price offered for it be my shadow, and shall therefore sign nothing. From this it may also be inferred that the capping to which you invite me must needs turn out to be much more diverting to you than to me; therefore consider me excused, and as that is simply the way of it – Let us part!” –

“I am sorry, Monsieur Schlemihl, that you stubbornly turn your hand from the deal I offered you in the spirit of friendship. However, I may perhaps be more fortunate another time. Hope to see you soon!

“A propos, allow me merely to show you that I do not permit the articles I buy to become in the least mildewed, but hold them in honour; and that they are in good keeping with me.” –

With this he pulled my shadow from his pocket, and unfolding it on the heath with a dextrous toss, he spread it out at his feet on the sunny side, so that when he walked away between his shadow and mine, they both waited on him; for mine had to obey him as his own, and comply with his every movement.

When I saw my poor shadow again after so long a time, and found it belittled to so despicable a service, precisely at a moment when I was enduring unutterable affliction for its sake, then my heart broke, and I began to weep bitterly. The hated one strutted about with the spoils obtained from me and impertinently renewed his proposal:

“It is still yours to have; a stroke of the quill, and with that you rescue poor, unhappy Mina from the blackguard’s claws and into the arms of the honourable Count – as I said, only a stroke of the quill.” My tears burst out with renewed force; but I turned away and beckoned him to be gone.

Bendel, who had followed my trail to this place, full of worries, arrived at this moment. When the faithful, upright soul found me in tears and saw my shadow – for it was unmistakable – in the power of the curious grey stranger, he resolved on the spot to restore me to the possession of my property, using force if necessary; and as he did not

know how to get to grips with the delicate item, he immediately assaulted the man with words, not making many requests, but rather at once commanding him to let me have what was mine without delay. The latter, instead of replying, turned his back on the innocent lad, and walked away. But Bendel raised the buckthorn cudgel he bore, and following on the stranger's heels, he mercilessly made him feel, under repeated injunctions to return the shadow, the full force of his sinewy arm. The other stooped his head and slouched his shoulders, as if used to such treatment, and continued with smooth steps on his wordless way over the heath, making off with my shadow and my faithful servant at the same time. I heard the muffled sounds rumble through the barren wastes for a long time, until at last they died in the distance. Once again, I was alone with my misery.

## VI.

Left alone on the desolate heath, I gave vent to a flow of tears, thus relieving my poor heart of an unspeakable, sinking burden. But I could see no limits to my effusive misery, no end, no aim; and I sucked with wrathful thirst on the new poison the stranger had poured into my wounds. When I called the image of Mina before my soul, and the beloved, sweet figure appeared to me pale and in tears, as I had last beheld her at my humiliation, then Rascal's silhouette stepped with brazen scorn between the two of us; I covered my face and fled through the wilderness, yet the hideous vision would not let go, but pursued me as I ran, until I sank breathless to the ground and moistened the earth with a fresh spring of tears.

And all because of a shadow! And one stroke of a quill would have restored this shadow to me again. I thought over the displeasing proposal and my refusal. All was a desert inside me; I had neither judgement nor mental capacity left.

The day passed. I stilled my hunger with wild fruits, my thirst in the nearest mountain river; night fell, I settled myself down under a tree. The damp morning woke me from a heavy sleep in which I had heard myself ruckling as in death. Bendel must have lost my track, and I was gladdened at the thought. I did not want to return to mankind, but chose to nervily flee like the timid mountain deer. In this way did I spend three fearful days.

On the morning of the fourth I found myself on a sandy plateau that shone in the sun, and I sat soaking her rays on a rubble of rocks; for I now liked to savour the sight of her, of whom I had long been deprived. I silently nourished my heart with its despair. Then a slight sound startled me; I threw my gaze around, ready to flee, I saw no one; but there came gliding past me, on the sunlit sand, a man's shadow, not dissimilar to mine, which, wandering along, seemed to have strayed from its master.

Then a powerful urge was aroused inside me: 'Shadow', I thought, 'are you seeking your master? I will be he'. And I bounded over to seize hold of it: you see, I thought that if I succeeded in entering its track, so that it came against my feet, then it would stick there and, with time, accustom itself to me.

The shadow, at my movement, took flight before me; and I had to begin an exhausting hunt after the airy fugitive, for which only the

thought of saving myself from my present dreadful situation could equip me with sufficient strength. He fled towards a wood, still some distance away, in whose shade I must necessarily have lost him; seeing this, fright flashed through my heart, inflamed my desire, gave wings to my feet – I gained visibly on the shadow, I came step by step nearer to him, I had to catch up with him! Now he suddenly stopped and turned to front me. Like a lion on his prey, I shot over with a tremendous bound to take possession – and met, unexpectedly and violently, with corporal resistance. I was invisibly portioned the most enormous thumps in the ribs ever felt by man.

The effect of this shock made me close my arms desperately shut and tightly squeeze what was standing unseen before me. In this swift action I plunged in a forward stretching motion to the ground; falling backwards, under me, a man, whom I held close and who now appeared to sight for the first time.

And now the whole affair was very easily explained. The man must have at first been wearing the invisible bird's nest, which removes from sight the man who holds it – but not his shadow – and now have thrown it away.<sup>13</sup> I scouted around with my eyes, discovered the shadow of that same invisible nest in no time at all, leapt up and over, and did not miss the precious spoils. I held, invisible and shadowless, the nest in my hands.

The man swiftly picked himself up and, at once looking around for his fortunate vanquisher, could descry on the broad, sunny plateau

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<sup>13</sup> *Das wunderbarliche Vogelsnest*, Part 1 (1672) and Part 2 (1675) by Hans Jacob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen. The bird's nest first appears in the same author's *Der Seltsame Springinsfeld* (1670), Chapter 23.

neither him nor his shadow, which he sought with especial anxiety. For my being totally shadowless was something that he had not had leisure to observe, and which he could not possibly have suspected. Once he was quite convinced that every trace had vanished, he turned his hands on himself in the deepest despondency and tore at his hair. As for me, the treasure I had won gave me simultaneously the ability and the desire to mingle with mankind once more. I did not lack pretexts to gloss over my contemptible theft to my mind – or rather, I did not need any such thing –, and to escape from every thought of that kind I rushed away, without looking back at the unhappy man, whose agonised voice I heard resounding after me for a long while. That is, at least, how all the circumstances of this affair appeared to me at that time.

I burned to go to the Commissioner's garden and see with my own eyes the truth of the tidings that the hated one had brought me, but I did not know where I was. I mounted the nearest hill, to survey the region; I saw, from its brow, the little town nearby and the Forester's garden lying at my feet. – My heart beat violently, and tears of a different kind from those I had lately shed swelled up in my eyes: I was to see her again. –

Breathless yearning hastened my steps down the shortest path. I walked unseen past several farmers coming from the town. They were talking about me, Rascal, and the Forestry Commissioner; not wanting to listen, I rushed away.

I entered the garden, shivers of expectation in my breast – a sound like laughter rang towards me, I shuddered, I threw a rapid glance around; I could not discover anybody. I walked onwards; I fancied I

heard the sound of footsteps beside me, but there was nothing to be seen, and I thought my ears had deceived me. It was yet early, with no one in Count Peter's arbour, and the garden still deserted; I rambled over the familiar walkways, reaching as far as the residence. The same rustling sound followed me more audibly. I sat down with an apprehensive heart on a bench opposite the front door, in a sunny spot. I had the feeling that I could hear the unseen goblin sit down beside me with sneering laughter. The key was turned in the door, it opened; the Forestry Commissioner stepped out, with papers in his hand. I felt a mist pass over my eyes, I looked around, and – horror! – the man in the grey coat was sitting beside me, staring at me with a satanic smile. He had pulled his cap of darkness over both our heads; at his feet lay his and my shadows, peacefully side-by-side; he was playing indifferently with the familiar parchment, which he held in his hand; and while the Commissioner paced up and down in the shade of the trees, intent upon his papers, he leant across to my ear like a familiar, and whispered the words:

“So you have accepted my invitation after all, and here we are, sitting, two heads under one cap. – All right! All right! But now give me my bird's nest back; you need it no longer and are too honest a man to wish to withhold it from me – but no thanks for it, I assure you that I lent it to you with a willing heart.” – He took it from my unresisting hand, put it into his pocket, and laughed at me once again, this time so loudly that the Commissioner looked for the sound. I sat there as one turned to stone.

“Now, you must confess,” he continued “that a cap like this is much more convenient. It covers not only its man, but his shadow as well, and as many others as he cares to take along. Just look, today I am leading two of them.” – He laughed again. “Mark this, Schlemihl: what a man does not at first wish to do with a good will, he shall be forced to do in the end. I should still think that you will buy the thing off me, take your bride back – for there is yet time –, and we let Rascal dangle from the gallows, that will be an easy stroke for us, as long as we do not lack rope. – Listen, I shall give you my cap into the bargain.

The mother now walked out, and a conversation began.

“What is Mina doing?” – “She is crying.” – “Naïve child! But nothing can be done about it!” – “No, indeed; but to give her to another so soon - - Oh husband, you are cruel to your own child.” – “No, mother, you have quite the wrong idea. When she finds herself the wife of a very rich and honourable man, then, even before she has cried her fill of childish tears, she will wake consoled from her sorrows, as from a dream, and thank God and us, you will see!” – “May God grant that it be so!” – “She does, indeed, now own very considerable estates; but after the stir occasioned by the unfortunate business with that adventurer, do you think that another match, so advantageous for her as Mr. Rascal, would turn up in a hurry? Do you know what kind of a fortune he possesses, this Mr. Rascal? He has purchased six million’s worth of estates in this land, free from all encumbrances, with ready money. I have the documents in hand! He it was who always anticipated me in my attempts at a desirable purchase; and besides, in his portfolio, there are bills of exchange on Thomas John for circa four-and-a-half million.” –

“He must have pilfered a great deal.” – “What kind of talk is that! He has wisely saved, where others squandered.” – “A man who has worn livery!” – “Nonsense! He has, at all events, an impeccable shadow.” – “You are right, but- -”

The man in the grey coat laughed and looked in my face. The door opened and Mina came out. She was leaning on her maid’s arm; silent tears flowed down her pale and lovely cheeks. She sat down in an easy chair placed for her under the lime trees, and her father took a chair by her side. He clasped her hand affectionately and addressed her, as she began to cry more bitterly, with tender words:

“You are my good, beloved child, and you will be sensible, you will not want to distress your old father, who only wants what is best for you; I do understand, my dear heart, that you have been badly shaken; you have escaped disaster by a miracle! Before we discovered the shameful deception, you loved that unworthy man dearly; you see, Mina, I know this and I do not reproach you for it. I myself, dear child, loved him too, the while that I considered him a great lord. Now you see yourself how everything has changed. What! why, every poodle has its shadow, and my beloved, my only child was to marry - - No, don’t you even think of him any more – Listen, Mina, a man is now asking to marry you who does not shy away from the sun; an esteemed man, who is admittedly no Prince, but owns ten million, a fortune ten times yours, a man who will make my beloved child happy. Do not reply to me, do not resist; be my good, obedient daughter, let your loving father care for you, dry your tears. Promise me you will give Mr. Rascal your hand – Tell me, will you promise me this?” –

She answered with a voice that had died: "I have no will, no wish hereafter on Earth. May what my father wills for me be done." At the same time Mr. Rascal was announced, and he brassily stepped into the circle. Mina lay in a faint. My hated companion looked at me with fury and whispered the rapid words: "And you can suffer *that*? Just what is running through your veins, in place of blood?" With a swift movement he scratched a light wound in my hand, blood flowed, he exclaimed:

"Indeed! Red blood! – So sign!"

The parchment and quill were in my hands.



## VII.

I shall expose myself to your judgement, my dear Chamisso, and shall not seek to corrupt it. I have long executed a severe sentence on myself, for I have nurtured the tormenting worm in my heart. This critical

moment of my life hovers perpetually before my soul, and I am able to contemplate it only with despairing eyes, with humility and remorse. – Dear friend, when a man merely takes a thoughtless step off the straight road, he is suddenly led off onto other paths, which pull him downwards, ever downwards; in vain does he see the lodestar glimmering in the sky, he has no choice, he must continue, unrelentingly, down the slope and sacrifice himself to Nemesis. After the precipitate lapse that had laden me with the curse, I had, by sinning through love, forced my way into another being's fate; what choice did I have, where I had sowed perdition, where swift rescue was demanded of me, but to blindly take that rescuing leap? for the final hour was striking. – Do not entertain so low an opinion of me, my Adelbert, as to think I could have fancied any price asked to be too high, that I would have been any more stinting with anything of mine than I had been with my gold. – No, Adelbert; but my soul was filled with insuperable hatred for this mysterious creeper on crooked paths. I might have been doing him an injustice, but every communion with him incensed me. –

Here too there occurred, as so often already in my life, and in fact as so often in world history, an accident in place of a deed. I have since made my peace with myself. In the first place, I learned to respect necessity – and what is the done deed, the realised event, if not its property? Then I also learnt to honour this necessity as a wise Providence, which blows through the whole of the great machinery in which we merely intervene as part-playing wheels, driving and driven; what is to be must happen, what was to be happened, and all this not

without that Providence, which I finally learnt to revere in my fate and in the fate of those it touched.

I do not know if I should ascribe it to the tension of my soul under the pressure of such forceful sensations, or to the exhaustion of my physical powers, which unfamiliar want had weakened over the last few days, or finally to the destructive agitation that the proximity of this grey fiend caused in me:- suffice to say, I fell, when it came to the moment of signature, into a deep faint; and I lay a long time as one in the arms of death.

Cursing and the stamping of feet were the first sounds to greet my ears when I returned to consciousness; I opened my eyes, it was dark; my hated companion was attending to me with reproaches: "Is that not the behaviour of an old woman! – Will one gather oneself up and be quick about executing what one has decided on, or has one changed one's mind and one will rather whimper?" –

I laboriously raised myself from the ground where I lay, and looked silently around. It was late evening; festive music rang out from the brilliantly illuminated Commissioner's house; various groups of company surged through the garden walks. A few approached in conversation and sat down on the bench where I had been sitting a short time before. They were conversing about the union, concluded this morning, of the rich Mr. Rascal and the daughter of the house. –

So it had happened.

I swiped the stranger's cap off my head, he at once disappeared from my sight, and immersing myself in the deep night of the bushes, taking the path past Count Peter's arbour, I rushed in silence towards

the garden exit. But my plaguing spirit escorted me unseen, dogging me with sharp words: "So that is the thanks for the trouble one has taken to care for the weak-nerved Monsieur throughout the whole, livelong day. And one is expected to play the pantomime fool. Fine, Mr. Contrary-Pate, just flee me; we are inseparable. You have my gold, I have your shadow; that gives both of us no peace. – Has anyone ever heard of a shadow leaving its master alone? Yours is dragging me after you until you restore it to favour and I am shot of it. What you failed to do with a merry mind, satiety and weariness will force you to perform, sooner or later; there is no escaping one's destiny." – He spoke on and on in this strain; I fled unavailingly, he would not let up; ever-present, he kept passing scornful remarks about gold and shadows. I was not able to come to a thought of my own.

I had taken a route through deserted roads towards my house. When I stood before it, and looked, I could scarcely recognise it; behind the smashed windows no light was burning. The doors were shut, no servants were moving inside. He laughed out loud beside me: "Yes, yes, that's the way it goes! But I should think you shall find your Bendel at home; he has recently been sent there as a precaution, so exhausted that he will, no doubt, have kept a close guard." He laughed again. "He will have tales to tell! – Well now! for today, good night, see you soon!"

I rang repeatedly, a light appeared; from within, Bendel inquired who was there. When the good man recognised my voice, he could scarcely contain his joy; the door flew open, we were weeping in one another's arms. I found him greatly changed, weak and ill; while my hair had turned wholly grey.

He led me through the desolate rooms to an inner chamber that had been spared; he fetched food and drink, we sat down, he began to weep anew. He told me that, the other day, he had beaten the grey-clad, scrawny man, whom he had found with my shadow, so long and so far that he lost my track, and sank to the ground from fatigue; that later, not being able to find me, he had returned to the house, where in little time the mob, incited by Rascal, came storming up, smashed the windows in, and satisfied its appetite for destruction. In this manner had these people behaved towards their benefactor. My servants had fled in all directions. The local police had banished me from the town as a suspicious character, stipulating a period of twenty-four hours in which to leave the area. To that which I knew about Rascal's wealth and marriage, he had a great deal to add. This villain, the author of all that had happened against me here, must have possessed my secret from the very beginning; it seemed that he, attracted by the gold, had known how to force himself upon me, and had, even at the earliest time, procured a key to that chest of gold, from which he had laid the foundations of a fortune great enough for him to scorn its further increase.

Bendel recounted all this to me through frequent tears, and then wept again for joy at seeing me once more, at having me once more, and, after having long harboured fears as to what the disaster could have brought me to do, at seeing me bear it with calmness and fortitude. For despair had now assumed such a form inside me. I saw misery, gigantic and unalterable, before me, I had cried out my tears, it could force no further shriek from my breast; I met it bare-headed and coldly indifferent.

“Bendel,” I began, “you know my lot. I am visited with a heavy punishment, not without former fault. You should, innocent man, no longer bind your destiny to mine; I do not wish that. I ride away this night; saddle a horse for me, I ride alone. You stay; I insist. There must still be some chests of gold here, you keep them. I shall wander alone, restless in the world; but whenever a happy hour laughs with me again, and fortune looks at me with placated eyes, then I shall faithfully remember you, for I have wept on your loyal breast in many a difficult, sorrowful hour.”

It was with a broken heart that the honest man obeyed this last command of his master, at which he was shocked to the soul; I was deaf to his pleas, his protests, and blind to his tears; he brought my horse before me. I pressed the weeping man to my breast one last time, vaulted into the saddle, and distanced myself, under the mantle of night, from the grave of my life, indifferent to the road my horse would take; for I now had, on this earth, no goal, no wish, and no hope.

### VIII.

I was soon joined by a wanderer, who, after he had strolled a while at my horse’s side, asked me, as we were after all keeping the same road, for permission to lay a cloak he was wearing on my horse’s crupper; I assented in silence. He thanked me with easy grace for this trifling service, praised my horse, took occasion thence to extol the power of the rich, and entered, I know not how, into a kind of soliloquy, to which I was merely a listener.

He expounded his opinions on life and the world, and came in no time at all to metaphysics, regarding which the call had gone out to discover the word that was the solution to all mysteries. He explained this theme very lucidly, and strode onwards to answer the call.

You know, my friend, that ever since I ran through the philosophers at school, I have clearly recognised that I do not have the slightest vocation for philosophic speculation, and I have renounced all claims to that field; since then I have left many things alone, abstained from knowing and comprehending a great deal, and have, as you yourself advised me, trusted my sense of correctness and followed the voice inside me in my own way, as far as this lay in my power to do. Now this word-spinner seemed to me to be making, with considerable talent, a solidly-constructed edifice that towered high and, being founded in itself, existed as through an inner necessity. It was just that I missed in it precisely that which I should have wanted to find; and so it became to me a mere work of art, whose elegance, unity and perfection served only to delight the eye; but I listened with pleasure to the eloquent man, who had diverted my attention from my sufferings on to himself, and I would willingly have devoted myself to him if he had engrossed my soul as he did my understanding.

Meanwhile, time had been passing, and dawn had, without my noticing, already illumined the sky; I gave a start when, looking up all of a sudden, I saw unfolding in the east that splendour of colours which heralds the approaching sun; and at that hour, when human shadows flaunt their whole expanse, there was no protection against it, no bulwark to be seen in the open region! and I was not alone! I threw a

glance at my companion and gave another start. – It was none other than the man in the grey coat.

He laughed at my consternation and continued, without allowing me to get a word in edgeways: “Now let, as is the practice of the world, our mutual advantage unite us for a while; we have yet time to part. This road here, alongside the mountains, although you have not as yet given the matter any thought, is actually the only one you could sensibly have taken – you dare not descend into the valley, even less will you wish to return over the mountains to the place whence you came –, and it just chances to be my road as well. – I see you blanching already at the rising sun. I shall lend you your shadow for as long as we keep one another company, and in return you will tolerate my proximity; you do not have your Bendel with you any longer, I shall serve you well. You do not love me; I am sorry for that. But you can make use of me. The Devil is not so black as he is painted. Yesterday you annoyed me, it is true; today I shall not hold that against you, and I have made your road hither seem shorter, you must yourself admit. – Take your shadow back on trial, just this once.”

The sun had risen, ahead on the road there were people coming towards us; I accepted – with inner repulsion – the proposal. With a smile he let my shadow slide to Earth; it directly took its station on my horse’s shadow and merrily trotted along after me at the side. I felt very strange. I rode past a troop of country-folk, who deferentially bared their heads and made way for the well-to-do man. I rode on, throwing sidelong looks with avid eyes and beating heart down from my horse at

this – formerly my – shadow, which I had now borrowed from a stranger, yea, from an enemy.

Who walked, carefree, alongside me, whistling a ditty. He on foot – I on horseback – a giddy fit seized me – the temptation was too great – I suddenly turned the reins, pressed both spurs deep into my horse, and thus raced at full gallop down a side road; but I did not carry off the shadow, which slid from my horse at the turn and awaited its lawful owner on the country road. I had to turn back, abashed; the man in the grey coat, once he had calmly made an end of his ditty, laughed at me, set my shadow to rights again, and informed me that it would not adhere to, and wish to stay with, me until I possessed it anew as the rightful owner.

“I hold you fast,” he continued, “by the shadow, and you will not escape me. A rich man like you simply needs a shadow, there is no other way; you are only to be reprimanded for not having recognised this sooner.” –

I continued my journey down the same road; all the comforts of life, and all its luxuries, came my way once again; I was able to move freely and easily, for I possessed a shadow, albeit a borrowed one, and I everywhere inspired the reverence that wealth commands; but I had death at my heart. My marvellous companion, who gave himself out to be the unworthy attendant of the richest man in the world, was exceptionally assiduous and skilful, and adroit beyond measure, the true epitome of a rich man’s valet; but he did not budge from my side, and constantly worked his tongue at me, always giving light to the firmest

confidence that I would at last – even if only to shake him off – conclude the transaction regarding the shadow.

He was as irksome to me as he was hateful. I had reason to be truly afraid of him. I had made myself dependent on him. He had a hold on me now, after having led me back into the pomp of the world I had fled. I had to let his eloquence wash over me, and I almost felt that he was right. A rich man must have a shadow in this world, and as long as I wished to claim that station, which he had tempted me to realise again, then there was only one outcome in sight. But this much was certain to me: having sacrificed my love, having seen my life fade away, I was not going to sign away my soul to this creature, not for all the shadows in the world. I did not know how it would end.

One day we were sitting before a cavern, which is customarily visited by travellers who cross the mountains. There one can hear the rushing of subterranean rivers roaring up from unplumbed depths; and there seems to be no bottom to halt the stone, which one throws down, in its echoing fall. With lavish powers of imagination, he sketched out to me in the shimmering charm of the most brilliant colours – as he did every now and then – carefully executed images of all that I might accomplish in the world by virtue of my purse, once I had recovered my shadow. Elbows propped on knees, I held my face hidden in my hands and listened to the False One, my heart split in two between temptation and my rigid will. I could not endure much longer with such inner conflict, and so the decisive struggle began:

“You seem, Sir, to forget that, while I have permitted you to remain as my companion on observance of certain conditions, I have reserved absolute liberty for myself.”

“If you but give the word, I shall clear off.”

This was a common threat of his. I was silent; he at once set to rolling up my shadow. I blanched; but I let it pass without saying a word. A long silence ensued. He found his tongue the first:

“You cannot stand me, Sir, you hate me, I know; but why do you hate me? Is it perhaps because you attacked me on the open road, meaning to rob me of my bird’s nest with violence? Or is it because you thievishly sought to purloin my property, the shadow that had been entrusted to your simple honesty, from me? For my part, I do not hate you for that; I find it quite natural that you should seek to bring all of your prejudices, deceit and violence to bear; incidentally, your having the absolutely most rigid principles and a way of thinking that is honesty itself, is a fancy I have nothing against.

“Actually, I do not think as rigorously as you; I merely act how you think. Or have I perhaps, at some time or other, pressed my thumb on your throat to bring your worthy soul to me, having just taken a fancy to it? Did I unleash a servant on you for the sake of my bartered purse? Did I tempt you to run off with it?”

I had no answer to this; he continued:

“All right, Sir, all right! You cannot stand me; I understand that as well, and do not hold it against you. We must part, that is clear; and you too are beginning to seem very tedious to me. Therefore, to escape my

embarrassing presence altogether, I advise you one, final, time: Buy the thing off me.”

I held the purse out to him: “At this price.”

“No!”

I heaved a deep sigh and spoke again: “And so. I insist on this, Sir, we must part; no longer bar my way into a world that I hope is spacious enough for us both.”

He smiled and replied: “I am going, Sir; but before that, I shall instruct you how to ring me, should you ever bear the desire to see your most humble servant; you need only shake your purse, to rattle the everlasting gold coins therein; the sound attracts me instantly. Every man considers his own advantage in this world; but you see that I am also concerned about yours: for I am disclosing a new power to you. – Oh, this purse! – And even if moths had already eaten up your shadow, there would be a strong bond between us. Enough: you have me by my gold, you may command your servant in the future as well; you know that I can prove myself assiduous enough to my friends, and that the rich especially are in my good books; you have seen this for yourself. – Only your shadow, Sir – let this be said to you – never again, unless on one single condition.”

Figures from the old days stepped before my soul. I hastily asked him: “Did Mr. John give you his signature?”

He smiled. “With so good a friend, that was not in the least necessary.”

“Where is he? By God, I will know!”

He hesitantly put his hand into his pocket; from it, pulled by the hair, appeared the pallid, distorted form of Thomas John, and the blue, dead lips moved to the hard words: "Justo judicio Dei judicatus sum; justo judicio Dei condemnatus sum."<sup>14</sup>

I was appalled; and hastily throwing the clinking purse into the abyss, I spoke these final words to him: "Then I command thee in the Name of God, Awful One! get thee hence, and never let me clap eyes on thee again!"

He rose grimly and instantly vanished behind the walls of rock that bounded this wild and desolate place.

## IX.

I sat there, shadowless and penniless; but a heavy weight had been lifted from my breast, I was serene. If I had not also lost my love, or had I only felt myself to be free from reproach for her loss, I believe that I might have been happy – but I did not know what to do with myself. Searching my pockets, I found several gold coins; I counted them with a laugh.

My horse was down at the inn; I was ashamed to return there, I had to wait at least for the setting of the sun; it was yet high in the heavens. So I lay down in the shade of the nearest tree and fell tranquilly asleep.

Charming images interwove in an airy dance to form a pleasant dream. Mina, a garland of flowers in her hair, floated past and gave me an affectionate smile. Honest Bendel, also garlanded with flowers,

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<sup>14</sup> 'By God's just judgement am I judged; by God's just judgement am I condemned'.

rushed past with a friendly greeting. I saw many others and, as it seemed to me, you as well, Chamisso, in the distant throng; a bright light was shining, but no one had a shadow, and, what is stranger than this, it did not look at all bad – flowers and song, love and joy in palm-groves. - - I could neither hold on to, nor grasp the meaning of, the nimble, delightful figures, so easily dispersed by the wind; but I know that I enjoyed dreaming such dreams and was careful of waking; I did indeed soon awake, and kept my eyes closed to preserve the retreating visions before my soul.

At last I opened my eyes; the sun was still in the sky, but in the East; I had slept the night away. I took this for a sign that I ought not to return to the inn. Easily giving my possessions there for lost, I decided to walk a by-way, which led through the wood-covered base of the mountains, leaving my future in the hands of Fate. I did not look back, nor did I think of turning to Bendel, whom I had left behind in wealth, as I certainly might have done. I looked at myself in the light of the new character I was to occupy in the world. My clothes were very modest. I had on an old black kurtka, which I had worn in Berlin, and which, I know not how, had first come back to hand when setting out on this journey. Apart from this, I had a travelling-cap on my head and a pair of old boots on my feet. I arose, cut myself a gnarled walking-stick from that place as a memento, and then began my rambling journey.

In the forest I met an old peasant, who greeted me warmly and with whom I entered into conversation. I inquired, with a traveller's eagerness to learn, first about the road, then about the region and its inhabitants, the productions of the mountains, and suchlike. He

answered my questions in a sensible and talkative manner. We came to the bed of a mountain-river, which had spread devastation over a wide stretch of the forest. I shuddered inwardly at the sunlit expanse; I let the countryman go on before me. But he came to a halt in the middle of this dangerous place and turned around, in order to recount the story of the inundation. He soon noticed what I lacked and paused in the middle of a sentence.

“But what is going on? The gentleman has no shadow!”

“Sadly! Sadly!” I replied, sighing. “In the course of a long and serious illness, my hair, nails, and shadow, all fell out. Look, father, at my time of life, the hair I have regained is all white, my nails are very short, and my shadow will not yet grow back.”

“Well! Well!” said the old man, shaking his head, “no shadow, that is bad! that was a bad illness the gentleman had.”

But he did not resume his tale, and at the next cross-way he left me without saying a word. – Bitter tears quivered anew on my cheeks, and my serenity was gone.

I continued on my way with a heavy heart, seeking human company no further. I kept to the darkest reaches of the forest, sometimes having to wait for hours to cross a sunlit stretch so that no human eyes would forbid me the passage. In the evenings I sought refuge in the villages. I actually went to a mountain mine, where I thought to find employment underground; for, apart from the fact that my present situation compelled me to support myself, I had clearly realised that only arduous labour could protect me from thoughts of destruction.

A few rainy days furthered me on my way, but at the expense of my boots, the soles of which had been meant for Count Peter, not for a foot-servant. I was now walking on bare feet; I had to find myself a new pair of boots. On the following morning I attended to this task with great earnest in a small town, where a kirmess was being held, and where old and new boots were standing for sale on a stall. I spent a long time choosing and haggling. I had to renounce a new pair that I would dearly have liked to have; the unreasonable demand frightened me. So I contented myself with a pair of old ones, still good and sturdy, which the handsome blond-locked lad who kept the stall handed to me with a friendly smile in exchange for exact payment in cash, wishing me a prosperous journey. I put them on at once and left the town through the northern gate.

Deeply engrossed in my thoughts, I hardly watched where I was putting my feet; for I was thinking about the mine, where I hoped to arrive that evening, and where I did not rightly know how I should introduce myself. I had not walked two hundred paces when I realised that I had lost my way; looking around, I found myself in a wild, ancient forest of firs that seemed never to have known the bite of an axe. I pressed forward several paces; I saw myself in the midst of barren rocks, which were covered with only moss and saxifrages, and between which lay fields of snow and ice. The air was very cold; I looked around, the forest had disappeared behind me. I took some further steps – all around there reigned the silence of death; the ice on which I stood, and on which a thick mist rested heavily, stretched out interminably; there was a blood-red sun on the edge of the horizon. The cold was

unbearable. I did not know what had happened to me; the benumbing frost forced me to hasten my steps; all I heard was the roaring of distant waters: a step, and I stood at the icy shore of an ocean. Before me, countless herds of seals plunged splashing into the water. Following this shore, I saw bare cliffs, land, birch and fir forests again; I ran straight ahead for a few minutes more. It was stiflingly hot; I looked around, I was standing between carefully cultivated paddy-fields under mulberry-trees. I sat down in their shade and looked at my watch: it was not yet a quarter of an hour since I had left the market town – I thought I was dreaming, I bit my tongue to wake up; but I was in truth awake.

I closed my eyes in order to gather my thoughts. Before me I heard strange syllables counted through the nose; I looked up: two Chinese, unmistakable through their Asiatic features, even had I given no credence to their clothes, were addressing me with the greetings customary to their language; I stood up and stepped back two paces. I saw them no longer, the landscape had changed completely: trees and woods, instead of paddy-fields. I examined these trees and the herbs that were blooming around me; the ones I knew were Southeast-Asian plants; I moved towards a tree, one step – and everything had changed again. I now moved forward like a recruit at drill, stepping slowly and sedately along. A wonderful variety of lands, meadows, pastures, mountains, steppes, and deserts unrolled before my astonished eyes: there could be no doubt, I had seven-league boots on my feet.

## X.

I fell on my knees in speechless reverence and shed tears of gratitude – for suddenly my future stood clear before my soul. Expelled from human society because of guilt early incurred, I had been directed towards nature, which I had always loved, by way of replacement; the Earth had been given me as a bountiful garden, study as the direction and strength of my life, science as its goal. I did not actually make the resolution. I have simply sought, since that time, to faithfully portray, with quiet, stringent, incessant application, that which appeared in my mind's eye as a bright and complete idea; and my self-satisfaction has depended on the correspondence of the portrayal with the idea.

I rose up to unhesitatingly take possession, with a rapid overview, of the field I was to harvest. – I stood on the summits of Tibet, and the sun, which had risen before my eyes a few hours previously, was sinking in the evening sky; I traversed Asia from East to West, overtaking her in her course, and entered Africa. I looked round with great curiosity, repeatedly striding across it in all directions. As I was gazing on the old pyramids and temples of Egypt, I espied in the desert, not far from the hundred gates of Thebes, the caves where Christian anchorites used to dwell. Suddenly I was clear and certain about this: your house lies here. – I chose one of the most secluded caves, which was at the same time spacious, comfortable, and inaccessible to jackals, for my future abode; then I followed my staff.

I stepped over into Europe via the Pillars of Hercules, and after inspecting its southern and northern provinces I walked to North Asia, and over the polar glaciers, to Greenland and America, and roamed

through both parts of that continent; then winter, which held sway in the South, swiftly drove me back northwards from Cape Horn.

I tarried in East Asia until day dawned and, after a short rest, continued my wanderings. I followed, through both Americas, the mountain-chain that includes the highest uneven areas known on our globe. I stepped slowly and carefully from summit to summit, now over flaming volcanoes, now over snow-capped hilltops, often breathing with difficulty; reaching Mt. Elias, I sprang over the Bering Straits into Asia.

Following its Western coast down its manifold turns, I investigated, with special attentiveness, those islands in that region which were accessible to me. From the peninsula of Malacca, my boots carried me to Sumatra, Java, Bali, and Lombok; I attempted – often with danger, and yet always in vain – to force a Northwest crossing over the rocks and islets, with which this sea is studded, to Borneo and other islands of this archipelago. I had to abandon hope. At last I sat down on the outermost point of Lombok; and, my face turned to the South and East, I wept, as a captive at the immovable grille of his prison, at having found the edge of my limits so soon. The remarkable New Holland, so vitally necessary to the understanding of Earth and her sun-woven mantle – the vegetable and animal worlds –, and the South Sea with its Zoophyte Islands, were forbidden me; and so everything I was to collect and construct was damned, at the very outset, to be no more than a mere fragment – Oh, my Adelbert, so much for the endeavours of man!



Often have I attempted, from Cape Horn in severest winter, to cover those two hundred steps across the Southern Hemisphere, westwards over polar glaciers, that separated me from Van Diemen's Land and New Holland, reckless of the return journey, not caring if this poor land should close over me like the lid of my coffin; I have taken the foolish risk of desperate steps over drift-ice, displaying defiance to the cold and the sea. To no avail; I still have not been to New Holland – I came back to Lombok every time, sat down on its outermost point, and wept again, my face turned to the South and East, as a captive at the immovable grille of his prison.

At last I tore myself from this spot and walked with a low heart into the Asian interior once again; I roamed further through it, following dawn to the West, and arrived that night at Thebes and my chosen house, which I had visited the previous afternoon.

As soon as I had rested somewhat and it was day over Europe, I made it my first concern to acquire all necessities. – First and foremost, brake-shoes; for I had learnt how inconvenient it is to only be able to shorten one’s stride, in order to examine close objects at leisure, by pulling off one’s boots. A pair of slippers, worn over them, had precisely the effect I was hoping for; and from that time on, I made it a habit to carry two pairs of slippers with me, because every now and then I kicked a pair off my feet, without having time to pick them up, on being startled from my botanising by lions, humans, or hyenas. My reliable watch proved an excellent chronometer for the short duration of my walks. I needed, besides, a sextant, and some physics instruments and books.

To procure all these, I went on a number of anxious walks to London and Paris, which favourable fogs shadowed for me. When the remnants of my magic gold were exhausted, I produced African ivory, which was easily found, for payment – admittedly selecting the smallest teeth, which were not beyond my strength to carry. I was soon supplied and equipped with everything I needed, and I at once commenced my new way of life as a scholar of private means.

I roamed around the Earth, measuring now her heights, now the temperature of her springs and the air, now observing animals, now examining plants; I hurried from the Equator to the Pole, from one world to the other, comparing experience with experience. The eggs of the African ostrich, or of the Northern sea-birds, and fruits – especially bananas and coconuts –, formed my usual nourishment. As surrogate for happiness I had nicotine, and for human sympathy and society the

love of a faithful poodle, who guarded my cave in Thebes for me and, when I returned to him laden with new treasures, sprang joyfully towards me, making me feel like a human being, and that I was not alone in the world. Indeed: an adventure was yet to bring me back among mankind.

## XI.

One day, as I was gathering lichens and algae on a Northern coast, with the brakes on my boots, a polar bear suddenly appeared round the corner of a rock. I meant to throw off my slippers then walk to an island opposite, to which a bare rock that jutted out above the water paved a crossing. I stepped surely onto the rock with one foot, but plunged into the sea on the other side; for, unnoticed by me, the slipper had stuck to the other foot.



The great cold gripped me, I saved my life from this peril only with difficulty; the moment I made land I ran, as quickly as I could, to the Libyan sands, to dry myself there in the sun. But when I was exposed to her, she burnt my head with such heat that I reeled back to the North, deeply ill. Seeking to obtain relief through vigorous motion, I ran with uncertain, rapid strides from West to East and from East to West. I found myself now in the day, and now in night; now in summer, and now in the chill of winter.

I do not know how long I staggered around Earth in this wise. A burning fever blazed through my veins; I felt, with deep anguish, consciousness leaving me. Misfortune would have it that, in the course of my rash running, I stepped on someone's foot. I may have hurt him; I received a hefty shove, and I fell over. –

When I regained consciousness, I was comfortably lying in a good bed, one of many in a spacious and handsome apartment. Someone was sitting at my head; people were passing through the hall from one bed to the next. They came before mine and began to discuss me. But they called me Number Twelve, and on the wall at my feet there was – most certainly, it was not an illusion, I could read it clearly – written quite correctly on a black marble slab, in large golden letters, my name

**PETER SCHLEMIHL**

The plaque also contained two lines of letters underneath my name; but I was too weak to bring them together, I closed my eyes again.

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I heard something read out loud and clear, in which the word was of Peter Schlemihl, but I could not grasp the sense; I saw a friendly man

and a very beautiful lady in black clothes standing before my bed. The figures were not unknown to me, yet I could not recognise them.

Some time elapsed, and I regained my strength. My name was Number Twelve, and Number Twelve, with his long beard, was regarded as a Jew; but he was not the less carefully nursed on that account. His having no shadow seemed to have remained unnoticed. My boots were, I was assured, together with everything that had been found on me when I had been brought hither, in good and sure keeping, to be delivered to me after my recovery. The place in which I lay ill was called the SCHLEMIHLIUM; that which was daily read out about Peter Schlemihl was an exhortation to pray for him as the originator and benefactor of this foundation. The friendly man I had seen at my bed was Bendel, and the beautiful lady was Mina.

I convalesced in the Schlemihlium, unrecognised, and learnt more: I was in Bendel's hometown, where, from the remains of my not otherwise hallowed gold, he had founded this hospital, where unfortunate souls blessed me, in my name; and he its was supervisor. Mina was a widow; an unhappy criminal process had cost Mr. Rascal his life and her most of her fortune. Her parents were no more. She was living here as a godfearing widow, practising works of charity.

One day, she was conversing with Mr. Bendel near Bed Number Twelve. "Why, noble lady," he asked her, "do you wish to expose yourself so often to the bad air that reigns here? Can Fate really have been so harsh with you that you desire to die?"

"No, Mr. Bendel, since I dreamt my long dream to an end and my self awoke, I have been well; since that time, I no longer wish for death,

nor fear its approach. Since that time, I think serenely of the past and the future. And are you not now serving your old master and friend in this divinely blessed way, with tranquil inner happiness?"

"God be thanked, yes, noble lady. We have indeed fared wondrously; we have thoughtlessly drunk much weal and bitter woe from a full cup. Now it is empty; one might fancy all this to have been but a trial, and now, armed with shrewd insight, we await the true beginning. For the true beginning is a second one, and one does not wish for the first illusion and is yet, by and large, happy to have lived it as it was. I also find in myself the confident feeling that life must now be faring better for our old friend than it did formerly"

"I feel so too," the beautiful widow replied, and they walked away from me.

This conversation left a deep impression on my mind; but I wavered in my soul between revealing my identity and going thence unknown. I made my decision. I had paper and pencil brought to me, and wrote these words:

"Your old friend is also faring better now than formerly, and although he must pay a price, it is the price of appeasement."

Hereupon I wished to clothe myself, for I felt stronger now. The key to the small trunk beside my bed was fetched. I found all my effects inside. I donned my clothes, slung my botanical case, in which I found, to my joy, my northern lichens again, over my kurtka, pulled my boots on, and laid the note on my bed; and no sooner had the door swung open than I was far down the road to Thebes.

As I was walking along the Syrian coast, putting behind me the road by which I had last left home, I saw my poor Figaro coming towards me. This splendid poodle had apparently wanted to follow the trail of his master, whom he must have long awaited at home. I stopped and called to him. He sprang barking towards me, with a thousand moving expressions of his innocent, boisterous joy. I took him under my arm – for he certainly could not follow me – and brought him back home.

There I found everything in its old order; and returned, step by step, as I regained my strength, to my previous activities and my old way of life; only that I abstained for a whole year from the utterly unbearable polar cold.

And in this wise, my dear Chamisso, am I still living today. My boots do not wear out, as the very learned work of the renowned Tieckius – *De rebus gestis Pollicilli*<sup>15</sup> – had initially made me fear. Their power remains unbroken; it is only my powers that are passing; but I have the consolation of having expended them for a purpose, in a continued direction, and not fruitlessly. I have, according to the reach of my boots, acquired a more profound knowledge of the Earth, her conformation, her heights, her temperature, her changing atmosphere, the manifestations of her magnetic force, and the life upon her – especially that of the plant kingdom – than any man before me. I have recorded the facts in clear order, with the greatest possible exactitude, in several works, and cursorily set down my conclusions and opinions in various treatises. – I have determined the geography of the African Interior and the Arctic lands, of Inner Asia and its eastern coasts. My

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Tom Thumb’ by Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853).

*Historia stirpium plantarum utriusque orbis*<sup>16</sup> is here, as an extensive fragment of my *Flora universalis terrae* and as a section of my *Systema naturae*. In this, I believe not only to have increased the number of known species by more than a third, but also to have thrown some light on the system of nature and the geography of plants. I am now working diligently on my fauna. I shall see to it that my manuscripts will be deposited at Berlin University before my death.

And I have chosen you, my dear Chamisso, to be the custodian of my wondrous history, in the hope that it might, once I am vanished from the Earth, serve as a useful lesson to many of her inhabitants. But you, my friend: if you wish to live among mankind, then learn to revere your shadow first and foremost, and money next. But if you only wish to live for your own, for your better self's, sake – oh – then you need no advice.

*Explicit*

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<sup>16</sup> 'Genesis of the Plants of both Hemispheres'.