

BOOK VIII

THE CORONATION OF NICHOLAS I

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To reach into the thoughts of a woman like Klara is not routine for us. Dealing with men and women who are well-protected by the best of the Guardian Angels, we take care not to approach for too little. We wait for openings. Sometimes emotional crises offer us the chance. Hysteria will often crack the door. (That is because many forms of hysteria are bewildering to the Cudgels—their calming arts have, temporarily, failed.) But for the most part, we leave protected people alone, even as the Cudgels usually avoid contact with our clients. Prudence prevails. Forced entrances are rarely attempted.

When, however, we must have an incursion, we wait for the Guardian Angel to be absent. At such times, a small raid is feasible. Many a devil can transform himself for a short period into an angelic presence. Since we are ersatz, we do not try to occupy a protected person's mind, but we do obtain a few gains so long as our presence can inspire a mood of beneficence in the target. He or she may even feel balmy enough to prate and prattle. The vulnerabilities of their heart can be divulged in a flood of laughter and happy words.

Moreover, Klara was hardly strange to us. Once, on the night that Adolf was conceived, she had been catapulted into a high state of concupiscence. Ever since, Klara has had her carnal depths. (Certainly on occasion!) A part of herself (usually concealed from herself) is still ready to engage in that fundamental rite of stinks and grunts and glories which does take place whenever God and the devil choose to sweat together in the swamp and paradise of sex. This may be why people who are notably ethical (and clean-smelling) usually do not offer any striking physical appeal. There is not enough of us to be found in them.

Enough. I do not know whether this is of significance, but the beauty of the spring day when Klara felt so happy holding Paula and talking to the flowers, happened to coincide (even to the hour) with the Coronation of Nicholas the Second. Indeed, the same warm spell was also there in Moscow, and for a number of days. I recall that even when I came back to Hafeld in early June, this fine period continued across much of Europe. Normally, my well-being is not affected by the weather, but these long sunny days enhanced my recollections of the aftermath of the Coronation.

As already indicated, I was one of the first to suggest to the Maestro that a direct attack on the crowning event was not likely to succeed. We could, of course, initiate a number of strikes. Nowhere else in Europe were we able to boast of as many agents and clients as in Russia. A number were of high rank. We possessed more than one Grand Duke and Duchess among the several branches of the Romanov family, including the Governor-General of Moscow. We certainly infested the secret police. (We had more agents in the Okhrana than did the Cudgels!) We also had Ministers of State who were as abjectly loyal to us as hounds slaving over kibble. We were well-installed in all the royal families of Europe, not to mention the

nobility and/or the generals—so often the same! Nouveau riches lay before us like an open whore. Tycoons were among our most valued and protected clients.

When it came, therefore, to calling upon such actors, we knew that if we were ready to accept the cost, we could bring off major disruptions on Coronation Day. Even one of the two Metropolitans who would preside over the theological ceremonies was ours, and indeed, we had many a cohort of half-mad monks in Russian Orthodox monasteries. More than a few would be coming to Moscow on this high occasion, and this is not even to speak of our share of anarchists, nihilists, and terrorists. The more militant among them would certainly be ready to attempt an assassination before or during the Coronation.

Nonetheless, I was opposed to such ventures. They would probably not succeed. I had dared instead to propose to the Maestro that we wait to attack until the Peasants' Festival took place. That was scheduled four days after. To my delight and to my woe, he accepted. I was full of foreboding. What if I was wrong? After this long period spent upon relatively minor activities in so many small places in Austria, I was poorly prepared to

absorb the monumentality of Russia. It was too intense! Not only could we muster hordes of devils to stir the hearts of half the people (half—at the least!), but Mosow and St. Petersburg were occupied by a greater assembly of angels than I had encountered in a long time. You may be certain that these worthies were active! Never had I felt the presence of the D.K. more directly. If He had often seemed disoriented to me by the uncountable number of successes and failures that take place every day in His Creation, He was now in evidence everywhere we turned.

For the longest time, I had been accustomed to thinking of Him as a near to unmeasurable force who might be ugly on occasion (by way of His Cudgels), but was removed enough to enable us to work in relative freedom. In Russia, however, His Nearness was evident. God wanted this Coronation to succeed! Had He chosen it as His Battleground? There was such intensity of dedication among the Cudgels that I knew we would pay heavily for any direct attack. This lay upon my judgment with all the weight of a hard fact—a stone too heavy to lift. Finally, I did. I had dared to suggest my plan to the Maestro, and he had accepted it.

Afterward, I knew dread. I was obsessed with one question: What could be God's motive for such unparalleled commitment to the success of the Coronation?

Until this event, the Dummkopf had invested His Substance in a variety of people and causes. He paid attention to Monarchists and Republicans, to the most established aristocrats and to revolutionaries who were ready to die for the honor of overthrowing these overlords. He had also encouraged many a human to offer public service to democracies. He hardly ignored the Pope and the Vatican (but then, neither did we!) He was open to the calls of liberty and to the injunctions of autocracy. As the Maestro once remarked, "It is not difficult to hear the workings of His Mind. 'I may make My mistakes,' He says, 'but I do pay attention to who wins. That way I can discover what works.' Why, after all," added the Maestro, "did He give Free Will to homo sapiens? Obviously, the poor Dummkopf wanted to draw closer to some notion of what He had actually created."

The Maestro might be enjoying his irony, but I was ready to conclude that the Dummkopf had come over, for the moment at least, to the

conviction that the well-being of much of His world was going to rest now on the need for a good and beneficent Tsar who would feel a close alliance to the Russian Orthodox Church. To So install Nicholas the Second with an unforgettable ceremony would thereby fortify Crown and Cross. Guided by Him, the Tsar might even be able to govern with authority over the vast energies of the Russian people.

It was more than an amazing decision. If true, it was a staggering choice. Worse than unruly, these Russian energies were inchoate. To depend on Russia—so invested with corruption! So teeming with injustice! It was what we looked to find. We searched for injustice. It was the yeast to inspire hatred, envy, and the loss of love. If we had an all-purpose rule of thumb, it was to encourage injustice wherever we could. For rare was the man or woman who did not possess an intense sense of the injustice done to them each day. It was our taproot to every adult. It was a fury in every child!

As I looked then for an explanation into the motives of the D.K., it seemed evident that part of the answer might be found in the young man who would receive the Coronation. While we prided ourselves on having a

keener appreciation of the flaws of men and women, then the Dummkopf, God, like many another creative artist, had His own vanities in this respect. Doubtless, He would have argued,—if debate between the Maestro and Himself were possible—that the history of human nature had been improved by the brilliant advent of Jesus Christ into the daily life of the world masses.

We were ready to disagree. We saw Christ's immediate efforts as ending in failure even if the Maestro had to respect the brilliance exercised by the D.K. in the aftermath. It was incontestable that the Lord recovered quickly enough to claim credit for the very crucifixion that the Maestro claims He had certainly wanted to avoid. "God," our Maestro was always ready to inform us, "proceeded to cheat. He traduced His own Game! Free Will for humans becomes meaningless once there is divine intervention. But leave it to the Old Goat! Secretly—blind even to His own motive—He was determined to establish His Kingdom on earth. In the most literal sense! He wanted a Kingdom with His Son on the throne. He most certainly was not anticipating the disaster that befell. Oh, our poor brother Jesus!" And the Maestro laughed. (He had a rich, self-pleasuring laugh whenever he made a remark corrosive enough to leave a scar on Scripture.)

Right or wrong, it was becoming evident to me that the D.K. was placing large hopes on the character of the young man who would soon be crowned Tsar Nicholas the Second. You may be certain that I made a request to the Maestro: Could I devote my efforts to learning as much about Nicholas as was possible? "Yes. Do what you can," said the Maestro. His readiness to agree aroused my suspicion that I was not expected to play much of a direct part in the very events I had proposed.

I did not know whether I was being promoted or abandoned, but I soon learned that, as I feared, it would not be routine to come near to this Nicky. (That is how everyone in his large family referred to him). Nicky had two younger brothers and two sisters, a beautiful Danish mother (the widow of his recently dead father, Tsar Alexander the Third), four Grand Dukes for uncles, one beautiful Grand Duchess as one of his aunts, and a host of cousins and in-laws who, for the most part, so far as one could discern, were surprisingly fond of him. Indeed! That, in itself, told much.

But I could not, as I say, come near. I had never encountered a human being more guarded by squadrons of angels. That was one most discernible impediment. I can detect as much as any animal with keen

olfactory senses provided I am able to take in the scent of a human being. And I see with precision. Even from the far end of a large room, I can perceive defects in the corner of a nostril or the ridges of an ear. Subtle flaws of character are thereby revealed to me. Yet, these fine senses I do not try to muster for all occasions. As a daily matter, Satanic existence would be enervating if our sight and taste and smell, our sense of touch and hearing, were always at so high a level of readiness—no, we call upon these exquisite faculties only when we need to learn a good deal in a hurry about a particular man or woman.

Here, however, I was not able to approach Nicky. So many Cudgels! Once again, I had to rely on the materials that some of our resident devils had picked up from those of our clients who work in the lower and middle reaches of the palaces of St. Petersburg and the churches and offices of the Kremlin.

This, then, is what I learned from such near-to-academic sources. While I am certainly not speaking of texts or of libraries, there was available a fund of copied letters and diaries picked up by royal valets, chambermaids, and house servants and that comprised a flow of useful

gossip and insights. It seemed as if everyone in every royal family of Europe was writing letters to his or her parents, children, aunts, uncles, cousins, and intimates. In addition, they all kept diaries. The Tsarevitch, soon to be Nicholas the Second, had made an entry in his embossed little book every day from boyhood on, and by the time of the Coronation he felt so close to Alix (his Tsarina Alexandra) that she seemed always by his side, and literally! His diary was not only open to her perusal, but received her written additions to many of his pages. Her language teemed with piety and declarations of love.

I was fascinated. This nearness to royalty was stimulating. I have to add that the Maestro warned me about the drawbacks. "Recognize that snobbery is for fools of the highest sort. It distorts every last finding you and your agents can bring in."

Reproof or not, I enjoyed the new work. This royal family was a conflux of the highest monarchs in Europe. Alix, the beloved of Nicky, might be only a princess from Hesse, but her mother, Alice, had been one of Queen Victoria's three daughters. Alice died when Alix was six years old, but afterward, Queen Victoria paid close and loving attention to the child on

her frequent visits to England. Then there was Kaiser Wilhelm the Second, the same Wilhelm who was the German Kaiser during World War I. He was married to Queen Victoria's oldest daughter. So, he was Alix's uncle. She called him Uncle Willy. The English prince who would become King George the Fifth of England was the nephew of Nicky's mother, Empress Marie. In turn, George's oldest son would yet become Edward the Eighth before he abdicated in order to marry Wallis Simpson. Surrounded by our devils, they were to live on as the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. (The D.K. did not even bother to assign any angel to that pair.)

If I list events still decades away, it is only to emphasize that half of Europe's highest royalty was closely related to Alix or to Nicky, or to both. (Even Alix's Uncle Willy, the Kaiser, was by another route a cousin to Nicky.)

In addition—no small addition—Alix and Nicky were in love. They were—I choose the word—desperately in love. If such a passion is obliged to be, in some part, false, as desperate love invariably is, Alix and Nicky had to be excellent actors all the same with deep respect for their roles. Indeed, many did believe that it was a most intense love born of an

adolescent infatuation when he was sixteen and she was twelve. For certain, this heartfelt absorption in each other managed to endure through many years of separation. Indeed, their closeness to one another would later be fortified by the birth of five children. I will not pursue it further at this point other than to say that they died (were murdered) on the same day, a year and a few months short of what would have been their Twenty-Fifth Anniversary.

Yes, by all the evidence, they were very much in love. In the weeks before the Coronation, I knew enough, however, not to suggest that this might be a true and enduring affection. That would hardly be to the Maestro's taste. Speaking to a few of us, he said, "Never let a night pass without meditating on the Great Swindle. The Dummkopf presents Himself as the Almighty Avatar of Love. He is full of Love, and those who Love Him are full of Love, and Love itself will solve all human problems. With this noxious pomade, He not only gulls a good three-quarters, at least, of His walking-and-talking animals, His humans, His creation, but He fools Himself. No one believes in Love so much as the Dummkopf."

I was ready to accept such a premise, indeed, I saw it as the heart of the Dummkopf's intense concern that the Coronation be a great success. Had He returned to the unbelievably unbalanced assumption that now at the end of the Nineteenth Century, a revival of monarchy might offer again the best foundation for society? Did He suppose that should a handsome young king and most attractive young queen be magnificently in love with each other, and wholly devoted to their faith, and—the first of loyalties—also believed in His Power and His Goodness, then these rare conditions satisfied, He could have the pleasure of initiating a very bold experiment? Would it turn out more happily than some of His other ventures? Perhaps, it could. After all, most monarchies had failed in the past because there was so little love at the top.

I was relieved. I now had a premise. Long ago I had learned that the study of new material was lifeless whenever one was lacking a vital hypothesis. Possessed of one, however, each new piece of knowledge was ready to contribute to the premise, or deny it. Now, one's studies could come alive. One's acumen was there to be enriched by every addition.

My question, then, had come down to this: Was the D.K. in full possession of His Faculties? Or was He growing senile?

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The boldness of such an assumption was disturbing. How could He be senile? When, on occasion, I find myself near the sea, it is difficult to believe that God is suffering any loss of His powers. Indeed, similar anxieties can be aroused in me by a fine field, a rocky crag, or the retort of the heavens when lightning is followed by thunder. A similar conclusion arises at the sight of a peerless sunset. One could even speak of dazzlements of light on wet grass when morning dew is on the ground.

Of course, He could have fashioned all this eons ago, yes, back at the peak of His Creative Powers when He was Young, and the skies and waters were not yet fouled by exudate. Did He now brood on the possibility that

these human Creations had become His least successful animals? Were we now awash in the dithering of a divinity who felt that His powers had gone askew? This Nicky and Alix—they seemed so naïve, so unfitted for the vast project they were to expedite. While I had not been able to get near to their living presence, I had certainly absorbed the tone of their love, their philosophy (such as it was!) and, over and over, their piety, their innocence. They actually believed that Nicky's diary, as well as their letters to each other were well protected from scrutiny when, in fact, a copy of the key to this diary—courtesy of a royal valet—had been in our possession for years. Indeed, they even put numbers on the envelopes—Letter 96, Letter 109, et cetera. It never occurred to Nicky or Alix that it took no exceptional skill to make a wax impression of a key, any more than we were in need of high competence to find the maid or body-servant who was ready to betray a trust.

So, I knew how they spoke to each other. I had read copies of their loving communications back and forth, hundreds of them. If I now present a small record of the missives passing between them and their relatives or close friends, it is to give a sense of how trivial were most of these

responses to the size of the royal dilemmas awaiting them. Indeed, I had to wonder all over again—why was God giving so much importance to Nicky and Alix?

Be it said, they were not altogether without attainment. Back in 1889, when she was seventeen, before they were ready to speak of their love for each other, Alix sent this missive on March 17:

It was so good of you to write and it gave me great pleasure. My mad letter amused you then—well, I have been cracked enough to write another. We went last night to see the "Rheingold" and I hope next week to see "Walkure's Siegfried."

His response came two weeks later:

Thank you so much for your dear little letter which was such an agreeable surprise to me . . . We also saw "Siegfried." I like it so awfully, especially the melody of the bird and the fire!

Young Wagnerites! At the edge of love! But they write to each other in English. He has been tutored in the tongue since boyhood and she, after all, has been so close to Queen Victoria.

By June, 1894, five years later, they passed through a theological obstacle. To become betrothed, Alix had to give up her Lutheranism, when she was as good as wed to it. Of course, theology is usually ready to offer astonishing exits from philosophical cul-de-sacs. Eventually, Alix agreed to accept the Russian Orthodox Church, and so the news could be given out to the royal families of Europe. In June of 1894, when their engagement is just two months old, Nicky is passionate in his declaration of happiness:

**I love you too deeply and too strongly for me to show it:
it is such a sacred feeling, I don't want to let it out in
words that seem meek and poor and vain! But now I will
try to break the habit of hiding my feelings, because I
think it wrong and selfish in some occasions. You also
do not know, my precious one, how long my whole heart
belonged to you and what sufferings it has gone
through these dreary years! Darling primrosy-mine,
I love you my darling!!!!**

Be it said, I took pains to count the exclamation marks. Is it not, after all, a point of kinship I can feel with him? The observant reader may have noticed that I, too, am fond of such punctuation, particularly at the end

of a parenthesis!! (Interruptions of attention should pretend, at least, to be vital!)

Four months later, Nicky's father is grievously ill. Alix, writing in Nicky's diary, offers this:

Sweet child, pray to God, he will comfort you don't feel too low, he will help you in your trouble, Your Sunny is praying for you and the beloved patient. Darling Boysy, me loves you, o so very tenderly and deep. Be firm and make the Doctors come alone to you every day and tell you how they find him, and exactly, what they wish him to do, so that you are always the first to know. Don't let others be put first and you left out. You are Father dear's son and must be told all and be asked about everything. Show your own mind and don't let others forget who you are. Forgive me lovy.

Two days later, she enters his diary again. She will share Nicky's anguish. She writes:

Tell me everything, dushka, you can fully trust me, look upon me as a bit of yourself. Let your joys and sorrows be mine, so that we may be ever drawn nearer together. My sweet One, how I love you, darling treasure, my very own One.

Dushka, when you feel low and sad, come to Sunny and she will try to comfort you and like her namesake warm you with her rays, God helping.

Only yours, quite your very own little spitzbub, Pussy mine!"

There is an entry next day by Nicky, 18 October:

A terrible, sad day! Dear Papa did not sleep at all, and felt so unwell in the morning that we were all woken up and called upstairs. What a trial! Then Papa became a little calmer and dozed fitfully throughout the day...

In the evening, Papa appeared a little better—but terribly weak! Our only reliance and hope is in the Mercy of the Lord, let His will be done!

I had to note how completely royalty is groomed to rely on the Lord's will. But then, royalty needs such belief. Their lives are that peculiar. They live, after all, in near to total isolation from common experience. Moreover, they are obliged to be painfully sensitive to the constant need for proper conduct (and so are invariably drawn to its opposite—especially with the carnal opportunities they are provided!) How then can they not believe that the disruptive events which occur so often in their lives are a product of

the Lord's will? All the same, Nicky is not ready for his father, Tsar Alexander III, to be so close to death.

Nicky's diary, 20 October, Livadia:

**My God, my God, what a day! The Lord has called
unto Him our adored, dearly beloved Papa.**

**My head is going round, I cannot believe it—
it seems inconceivable, a terrible reality.**

**It was the death of a Saint! Lord, help us in
these terrible days!**

Later, I learned that Nicky was thinking of the hour in his childhood when a nihilist had succeeded in planting a small bomb inside the railroad car in which his father had been travelling with his family. When the explosion went off, given its inexpert placement, the blast blew the roof upward rather than crashing it down upon them. As a result, no one in the royal family was critically injured. Right after, however, the roof did began to settle down upon them. Tsar Alexander III, a giant of a Romanov, used the holy and unholy strength of his arms to hold up the beams of the ceiling long enough for the family to be rescued. Only a saint was capable of such strength, declared his wife, a small and beautiful woman.

So, too, did Nicky believe that his father was a saint. Nicky was short like his Danish mother, and revered Alexander's physical power. All through his adolescence, Nicky had worked at body-building. He also excelled at horsemanship and at hunting—a point of honor to him—he grew a fine brown mustache and beard, yet he never grew large enough to look like a Romanov. Now, on his father's death, he would be the Tsar. Nicholas II, Nicholas the Second.

Here, I must introduce some written comments by Nicky's cousin Sandro who is married to Nicky's sister, Xenia. A bit of a firebrand, Sandro is Nicky's closest friend:

"Sandro, what am I going to do," he exclaimed pathetically. "What is going to happen to me, to you, to Xenia, to Alix, to mother, to all of Russia? I am not prepared to be a Tsar. I never wanted to become one. I know nothing of the business of ruling. I have no idea of even how to talk to the ministers."

Nicky, Diary, 21 October, Livadia:

In the midst of our deep sorrow, the Lord has sent us a quiet and radiant joy: at 10 o'clock in the presence of

the family, my dear darling Alix was anointed with the holy oils and after the service we took communion together, with dear Mama and Ella. Alix repeated her responses and prayers wonderfully well and distinctly!

After luncheon we held Prayers for the Dead and again at 9 o'clock in the evening. The expression on Papa's face was wonderful, smiling as if he were about to laugh!

22 October.

Last night we had to carry Papa's body downstairs, as unfortunately, it has rapidly begun to decompose. Thank God, dear Mama is completely calm and is bearing her sorrow in a truly heroic way! I did nothing but answer the pile of telegrams.

24 October.

The day was grey—as it was in our hearts! I still cannot bring myself to go into the corner room where dear Papa's body is lying—he is so changed since being embalmed. I cannot bear to dispel the wonderful impression of the first day!

Actually, they soon had to cover the Emperor with a large imperial cloth for his hands and face were turning black.

It may be worth including a letter from Kaiser Wilhelm II (Cousin Willy) to Nicky, which was sent on 27 October from the Neues Palais, Potsdam:

My dear Nicky,

May Heaven comfort you in your grief and give you strength for your heavy duties, and may a long and peaceful reign give you the opportunity of looking after the welfare of your subjects. The sympathy and real grief at the so untimely end of your lamented father in my country will have shown you how strong the monarchical instinct is and how Germany feels for you and your subjects. As for me, you will always find me the same in undiminished friendship and love to you.

It would, of course, be twenty years before they went to war against each other.

On the seventh of November, one of our English agents intercepted a communication from Lord Carrington to Queen Victoria, which offered a

detailed report on Tsar Alexander III's funeral. It was obvious Her Majesty was attracted to details.

Lord Carrington to Queen Victoria:

The service was choral without organ—the Empress and Princesses standing or kneeling the whole time. The mass continued for an hour and a half, plaintive and monotonous and then the usual daily funeral service was gone through. Tapers were lighted and handed round, but in consequence of the crowd, no ladies took any and so accident from fire was averted. At 12:30 the terrible ceremony of paying the last farewell took place. The Empress with heroic courage walked up steadily, knelt, and then took a last look at the late Emperor and kissed the sacred picture on His Majesty's breast, and then kissed his lips. The Emperor supported and took great care of Her Majesty and all the Royal Personages present kissed the sacred picture.

Like most diplomats, he was ready to nourish a monarch's vanity:

All the ladies in Russian costume, some with fine diamonds but hardly any pretty faces; indeed, the absence of beauty as compared with that seen at one

of Your Majesty's drawing rooms struck the Lord Chamberlain very much.

The wedding of Nicky and Alix was obliged, of necessity, to come a few days after the funeral. It would hardly do for the Tsar of all Russia to be an unmarried man. If the Tsar was the nearest Russian to God, then what could be of more importance than for this divine adjunct to commit to a wife who would bear His sons?

The marriage was, of course, a large event, and on my arrival, I was offered many accounts by our resident Russian agents. So I had an all-but-complete recapitulation of how it had been back on November 14 of 1894, when the nuptials took place. To those of us who were in need of such background, our resident devils did offer a set of images vivid enough to inspire something like the confidence that we had been there. I do feel free to describe it as if I had been in the great rooms of the Winter Palace. On this occasion, over 10,000 people were there in all their finery. Mind you, they were without chairs. The Russians seem to believe that devotional services should exact a penance on the body. So the mighty had to stand for

three hours while liturgies were recited. All the while, choral music continued, sad, and in its way, majestic, due to the length of the occasion. It is as though the deepest groans of Jesus Christ were to be heard again.

Yes, He was a presence to be meditated upon. Ten thousand of the powerful and the wealthy stood in place, an assembly of high generals, admirals, field and staff officers, as well as each and every last lady of St. Petersburg (as well as many from Moscow who had also been presented at Court.) Also present was every dignitary from the First, Second, Third and Fourth Class of the bureaucracies, and many of the mayors of cities and large towns, as well as countless new Russian businessmen and their wives. Plus one hundred maids of honor.

Lord Carrington has a comment here:

One maid of honour was so old that she was propped up against a wall and finally a chair was brought for her in which she was placed until required.

One of our English clients, well installed in Victoria's court, reported that the Queen on reading this was heard to exclaim, "Oh, these Russians—

animals all! Poor Alix will need every bit of the fortitude we have implanted in her!"

Carrington catered to Victoria's family pride when he described the Bride:

... simply magnificent—on her head she wore a circlet of diamonds with a diamond top which made it into a crown, a splendid necklace, and an enormous mantle of cloth of gold lined with ermine. She was the perfection of what one would imagine an Empress of Russia on her way to the altar would be and moved along quite simply and with great dignity. She makes very marked bows with her head when she greets anyone, and this is much noted and appreciated.

Our devils, not in the least generous about such matters (except when protecting a client) remarked that this bobbing of her head was reminiscent of the pouter pigeon!

The ring was placed on the Bride and Bridegrooms' fingers, and then they walked 3 times around the altar, and knelt in front of it--gold crowns being held over

**their head the whole time. The Bride was proclaimed
Empress at five minutes past one.**

I now had a slightly better notion of why the D.K. had so committed Himself to Russia. How these Russians believed in Him! I had to worry that Russians were not for me. They were so much more intense than the Germans and Austrians with whom, of late, I had been familiar. In contrast, I could hardly understand that nuptial ceremony when Nicky and Alix circled the altar three times. Were they paying homage to the great beasts who prowl through Russian dreams?

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I was soon able to read all the letters supplied to me in the period after the wedding. A close study opened a few curious questions. Just a few days later on the 17th of November, Nicky wrote,

I am unbelievably happy with Alix, it's only a pity that my work takes up so much of the time I would like to spend exclusively with her!

On the 26th of November, off by themselves in Tsarskoe Selo, he remarks,

Such a dear place for us both; for the first time since our wedding we have been able to live alone and live

truly soul-to-soul.

Immediately this is followed by Alix's reaction to reading these words. She adds to his diary:

Never did I believe there could be such utter happiness in this world, such a feeling of unity between two mortal beings. I love you—those three words have my life in them.

On the next day she adds,

At last united, bound for life, and when this life is ended, we meet again in the other world to remain together for all eternity.

I was overcome with her ignorance, and her confidence. She was so certain they held a joint passport to the Eternal! Yet, on December 14, a bit more than two weeks later, he wrote:

**Today it is one month since we married—strange to say, I am only just beginning to get used to the idea!
My love for Alix keeps growing!**

Rarely had I encountered newly-weds who were as infatuated. They did not seem inclined to distinguish the honey of first sex from the nectars of love. Yet Nicky, after all, was twenty-six, and no neophyte, not to sex.

(His military days had offered the expected female bounty.) In contrast, Alix had been so complete a virgin. Moreover, she had also grown up with the woe of losing her mother at the age of six. Then add her piety. So I was not ready to accept her entries in Nicky's diary as whole truth. To me, they seemed overwrought and much too filled with the necessity to be absolutely in love.

Of course, I could not be certain. He was the Emperor of a vast land teeming with spirits and barbarians. Whenever he passed by a fine copse of forest, he could remind himself that this loveliness was his land. His Land. He was one of the chosen of God. And all the while he was short in height compared to his dead father and his giant uncles, the Grand Dukes. He felt unready. How, then, could he (He?) fail to make all he could of Love? Love was a vertiginous ascent and you kept your balance by climbing upward, always upward.

Nonetheless, I could come to no firm conclusions, not from this study of their writings. The damnable question was still pending—what was the Dummkopf up to? Was it not conceivable that in His Desire to make their marriage beatific for His Purposes, God was also enriching them with

physical ecstasies? How could I know? I could not come near. I had only these stolen fragments from their letters, and the reasonable assumption that if God was going to choose a Tsar, He would be ready to offer His wisdom and strength—against, of course, the no small skills of the Maestro.

-4-

As has been indicated, Nicky was all but totally unprepared to become the Tsar. Everyone in the Court had assumed that Alexander the Third would rule for another generation at least.

Nicky, Diary, 17 January 1895, St. Petersburg:

An exhausting day. Went with Alix to the Winter Palace. I was in a terrible state about having to go to the Nikolayevsky Hall and deliver a speech to the representatives of the nobility, the *zemstvos* [local councils] and the town committees.

He had been closeted with the Grand Dukes before he gave the speech. They had assured him that he must follow in his father's footsteps. He must be absolute! His grandfather, Alexander II, had been assassinated, and his father had had a very close call. Russia was so vulnerable to grand mal that one misstep could release a frenzy. Absolute allegiance to autocracy—nothing other could be proclaimed.

From Nicky's speech to the representatives of all estates:

17 January 1895, St. Petersburg:

I am aware that recently in some *zemstvos* there have arisen the voices of people carried away by senseless dreams of taking part in the business of government.

Let everyone know that I will retain the principles of autocracy as firmly and unbendingly as my unforgettable late father.

All the same, his official duties continued to oppress him. His repetitive lament is that he cannot spend enough time with Alix.

Then, as the first winter of their marriage came to an end, she began to develop symptoms. We counted on that. Symptoms were our stock-in-trade. Proper Victorian women were never easy to invest, but we could

always send a shiver into their corseted defense of personal virtue by tainting their dreams with one or another smelly thought. That was enough to spoil many an hour in their marriages.

Nicky's diary, 9 April, 1885, St. Petersburg:

Unfortunately, dear Alix's headache continued all day. She did not go upstairs at all—neither to church nor to luncheon.

Nicky's Diary, 10 April 1895, St. Petersburg:

Dear Alix still has an unbearable pain in the temples and she was obliged to remain in bed, on my advice.

Indeed! An ongoing headache! When intense enough to be characterized as migraine, these headaches speak to us of a clear desire to commit murder. I do not believe Alix had such sentiments toward her husband, but it was doubtless another matter with her mother-in-law, the Empress Marie. That beautiful little brunette had adored her poor dead husband for the best of reasons and one of them was that she had been the Empress. Already, the two women were developing animosities toward each other they could not afford to recognize.

By June, Alix was free, however, of her worst headaches. She was also pregnant. I suspect that her mother-in-law was, in consequence, less of a pressure upon her temples. In an entry to Nicky's diary on June 10, she writes:

My sweet old darling manykins, Wify loves you so deeply and strongly, you are my one and my angels, what intense happiness. . .ours. . .our very own. . .what happiness could be greater; only Wify must try and be as good and kind as possible lest another little person suffer for it. A big kiss.

This is June, but the baby will not be born until November. Is Alix suggesting that they have no contact down there until the baby arrives?

My comprehension of their love was not advancing. How much of their adoration was exaggerated? None of us were ready to admit as much to ourselves (and never, certainly, to the Maestro) but the presence of real love often blurred the clarity of our analysis. We could penetrate every aspect of false loves, we had, for that matter, not even the impulse to capture active lovers as our clients. For being in love not only leaves the average man or woman much too open to angels and demons, but also to suspicions,

beatitudes and heartbreaks. When we do take direct interest, sharp engagements are fought between the Cudgels and ourselves. We are demonic at converting the sensitivities of love to the all-out imperatives of lust, except for those special occasions when God decides that lust will be beneficial for one of His chosen, yes, there is Godly lust as well.

It is a curious contest. The angels have powerful sweets to offer, and we know how to inspire jealousy, doubt, even momentary revulsion toward the beloved. I would say we possess more improvisational skills than the Cudgels, but we do lack a quality which I do not wish to confess, although I must, or what I offer will make no sense. It is that I know everything about love but Love itself. I can hardly bear to make this confession. Yet, it is true. I can recall nothing of my existence as human, not even whether I ever did exist in that state, (although for some unlocatable reason I feel that I was indeed, at one time, a man.) This, however, I can say—I have never known Love. I can expatiate upon its properties and tendencies, its dilemmas, its dissipations, I can delineate most of the reasons for its augmentation or disappearance, I can tell you everything about Love except for some

knowledge that is apparently missing at the core. It is that I cannot distinguish true love from its most developed and artistic substitutes.

Witness, then, my confusion concerning Alix. I could begin to comprehend Nicky. Given his situation, he needed love the way others require drink.

But Alix? I could not say whether she was a rare if somewhat tasteless princess (when it came to writing her *billet-doux*), or was truly in love. Or, was her amorous hysteria no more than her special way of supposing that she, the Tsarina, felt heights of passion, pleasure, and devotion.

Given, however, that curious line in her letter, "Wify must try and be as good and kind as possible lest another little person suffer for it," I came to a conclusion. She was declaring a temporary moratorium on sex. On many a milk-run, I had watched any number of pregnant women enjoying the act in the eighth or even the ninth month. Of course, Alix was preparing for the next Tsar, and one wouldn't dare to bruise the development of that royal head, but still!—was there to be no sex on the schedule from June to November! I leaned now to the hypothesis that Alix had strained mightily

to rise to the passionate heights she deemed necessary for this first period of their marriage, but that accomplished—at least in part—and the heir-to-be now in place, she was ready to take a rest. Yes, we must not do it "lest another little person suffer."

-5-

If the Romanovs are now at the center of my interest, this is no more than a temporary matter. To understand Adolf Hitler will remain the core of my motive for writing this book. Nonetheless, there are a few interesting if attenuated connections between that same Kaiser Wilhelm II who was always impressing his family weight on Nicky's mind, and Hitler himself (who, by the way, would yet condemn Willy as the fool who had helped to lose World War I for Germany.) Nonetheless, both men had, at wholly separate times, cordial relations with an English philosopher named Houston Chamberlain. The latter was so devoted a Wagnerite that he even dared to marry Wagner's daughter, Winifred, and Hitler, a devout Wagnerite

himself from the age of sixteen, would choose at the Bayreuth Festival in 1923, to meet Houston Chamberlain. The latter, though English, was an intense believer in the putative superiority of the German soul. He was happy to pass on his baton to Hitler. What Chamberlain had envisioned in his master work—Foundations of the Nineteenth Century—might now come to pass through the exceptional figure of this new leader, this young Hitler, who had even arrived to pay a bit of homage. Chamberlain's vanity was still intact, but he was virtually on his death-bed for this encounter. Nonetheless, his support offered political substance to Adolf. Chamberlain had been, in his time, the intellectual who had been most favored, honored, and respected by Kaiser Wilhelm whose own ideas (as will be suggested in the next two letters) were waiting for a philosopher to amplify them.

In September and October of 1895, on the 14th of the first month and the 13th of the next month, Uncle Willy wrote to the new Russian Tsar. His English might not be perfect, but his ideas were important to him.

**Kaiser Wilhelm II to Nicky, 14 September 1895, Jagdhaus
Romingen**
Dearest Nicky,

God knows that I have done all in my power to preserve the European Peace, but if France goes on openly or secretly encouraged like this to violate all rules of international courtesy and Peace in peacetime, one fine day, my dearest Nicky, you will find yourself nolens-volens suddenly embroiled in the most horrible of wars Europe ever saw. Which will by the masses and by history perhaps be fixed on you as the cause of it. Pray don't be angry, if I perhaps hurt you quite unintentionally, but I think it my duty to our two countries and to you as my friend to write openly. Think of the awful responsibility. . .

Now goodbye, dearest Nicky, best love to dear Alix, and believe me ever your fond devoted and faithful friend,
Willy

Kaiser Wilhelm II to Nicky 13 October 1895

Neues Palais, Potsdam

Dearest Nicky,

That it is not the fact of a "Rapport" or friendship between Russia and France that make me uneasy—every sovereign is sole master of his country's interests and he shapes his policy accordingly—but the danger which is brought to our Principle of Monarchism through the lifting

**up of the Republic on a pedestal. Don't forget that Faure—
not his personal fault—sits on the throne of the King and
Queen of France by the grace of God whose heads Frenchman
Republicans cut off. The blood of their Majesties is still on
that country!**

**Look at it, has it since then ever been happy or quiet
again? Has it not staggered from bloodshed to bloodshed?
Nicky, take my word on it, the Curse of God has stricken that
People forever! We Christian Kings and Emperors have one
holy duty imposed on us by Heaven, that is to uphold the
Principle "von Gottes Gnaden." [by the grace of God.]
Your most devoted and affectionate friend and cousin,
Willy**

There is no record of any reply by Nicky to these weighty warnings.
It is possible that the new Tsar is paying no attention. After all, Uncle
Willy, according to Alix, is gloomy and always full of foreboding.
Moreover, Nicky is concerned about Alix. She is more than pregnant. Her
belly is huge. It is no common anxiety to await the birth of an heir—the
young bouncing male baby who will become the next Tsarevitch to
Nicholas II.

It is the mark, however, of Romanov breeding—indeed, it is part of their honor—that no disappointment is mouthed when the infant is born. A strapping ten-pound female has come forth.

It does not matter to Nicky. His love is so direct that his relief is pure. No matter the sex of the infant—Alix is safe!

Nicky's Diary 3 November 1895 Tsarskoe Selo

A day I will remember forever. At exactly 9 o'clock P.M. a baby was delivered and we all breathed a sigh of relief. With a prayer we named the daughter from Almighty God "Olga!" When all the anxieties were over and the terrors had ceased, there was left simply a blessed feeling at what had come to pass. Thank God Alix came through childbirth well and felt quite alert in the evening.

By the morning of the next day he is rhapsodizing.

Nicky Diary 4 November 1895 Tsarskoe Selo

I can hardly believe it's really our child! God, what is happening? There was a mountain of

telegrams

And by the following day, Nicky is fascinated by a few unexpected aspects of infant nutrition.

Nicky, Diary 5 November 1895 Tsarskoe Selo

The first attempt at breastfeeding took place and ended up with Alix successfully feeding the son of the wet-nurse while the latter gave milk to Olga.

Very funny!

6 November 1895

Thank God, all is well, but the baby does not want to take her breast so we had to call the wet-nurse again.

I was not surprised. Devils at my level can interpret the sentiments of an embryo in the final months. These creatures do express themselves (in the last trimester) through their mothers' dreams. It seems evident that most babies come into the light of the birthing room with an affection or an antipathy toward the benevolent caretaker (or the surly warden) who so recently constituted the walls of their womb. That is exactly why women

feel desolate when their milk is refused by their babe. Guilt is aroused. They know how mixed were their feelings.

Nonetheless, these two, the wet-nurse and the young Empress, are doing their best to avoid this recognition. So is Nicky. He is quick to declare that yes, it is very funny indeed. I expect Nicky is ready to tell himself that huge little Olga has the sturdy instinct to wish to smell and taste the paps of a strong Russian woman, even as the wet-nurse's suckling will be intimate with a slim and lovely queen at least once in his young life. And I, from my funds of cynicism, think that the two women, so profoundly different, and never by any other means to know cohabitation, (or even suggest it!) can, nonetheless, enjoy this open (yet surreptitious) connection of the flesh.

Less than half a year later, Alix has certainly resumed relations with Nicky.

*29 March St. Petersburg [in Alix's hand]
sweet precious Nicky mine, no words can express
how deeply I love you--more and more, day by day,
deeper--truer. Lovy sweet do you believe it, do you
feel hearty throb so quickly, and only for you, my*

husband

Nicky has been so good about the birth of a princess rather than a prince, that Alix to her sweet surprise has had a "hearty throb" on the moment he entered her, a novel event, or, at least, I assume as much. Let me admit that being obliged to see them only at a distance, and limited, therefore, to the close study of their letters, I do have to take chances to arrive at an interpretation. Then, certain conclusions alter with time. Olga, for instance, has come to accept the given. Once a day, she feeds at her mother's breast while Alix takes her morning coffee with the Emperor.

Actually, I could feel a shift within the court. The Coronation of Nicholas II was approaching. It is safe to add that there could have hardly been a devil present who was not stirring with elation and dread. There is never a time when we devils can feel as human, and crowds feel as demonic as in the presence of a great occasion, especially if there will be a massive ceremony to accompany it.

-6-

Festivities for the Coronation would take place over six days from May 9th to May 16th, and the preparations in Moscow became as extensive as a city beneath the city. Countless numbers of platforms had to be erected for the spectators, and there was a plethora of patriotic displays. Many false fronts now hid the uglier buildings on the route. Everywhere one saw two large letters, "N" for Nicky, and "A" for Alix, painted on walls. Holy patriotic words accompanied them. "God Save the Tsar," and "Glory to our Russian Tsar, Glory, Glory, Glory!" were the most popular.

One of the Russian authors I had read in preparation for understanding St. Petersburg and Moscow was Maxim Gorky. Like any

good radical of this period—and we were on close terms with many—sometimes I did not know whether we were looking to monarchists to do their utmost for us, or might it be their enemies? In any event, Maxim Gorky, was infuriated by such an over-froth of patriotism. Moscow, he told his friends, was like a salacious widow who has bedizened her crotch with French lingerie—old lady Moscow on the hunt for a new bridegroom!

I was not assigned to Maxim Gorky, and so did not have the pleasure of following him through his day. But the streets were exceptional. These days, the people of Moscow could have been mistaken for denizens of St. Petersburg. There, up north, if you saw 100 men passing, at least ten were in uniform. Now, here, on the best street, Kuznetsky Most, Moscow was awash in officers come to the city from many a nation, speaking many a language. A world congress could have been in progress.

I made a point of studying the city. I hardly needed the knowledge for my particular mission and yet, it is dangerous to prepare for a large move when one is unfamiliar with the terrain. So, I set out to learn as much as I could, and thereby noted that many of the local merchants and residents who lived or did business on the route were profiting. They sold space in

their abodes to spectators. Anyone who had a window on the street was able, for example, to rent out a room for 200 rubles from dawn to sunset on any one of the days from May 9th to May 14th. Carriages with their coachmen cost 1200 rubles for the month. Useless to argue that one only wanted the coach for the week, or that one could buy ten good horses for such an amount. 1200 rubles! Even to find a limited view in a narrow space on a flimsily-built platform came to 10 or 15 rubles—woe to those who were obese. Woe to all standing next to such a fat one. And that was all you got for fifteen rubles. To afford a balcony you had to spend 500, which was the equal, I suppose, of purchasing four or five good horses. Those who belonged to the English Club fared a little better. Since it was the English Club, each member had an eye for the ladies, and was allowed therefore to bring as many as four lady guests. Being English, however, they were quick to instruct their members that on procession day, May 9th, all must be in their places by 8 in the morning. They would not be expected to stand on the newly-constructed balcony of the Club until the parade was commenced, but they had at least to be on the premises. Since that would entail a two and a half hour wait, breakfast was served, a most special

English breakfast—kippers, sausage, bacon, porridge and eggs—and the men, whether English, or looking to be taken for citizens of Great Britain, all wore early-morning tail-coats. The only contretemps occurred when the police insisted on examining every nook of the club. Even the janitors were cross-examined by the police. The managers of the club did their best to mollify members and guests by explaining how each and every building on the route had been examined in similar fashion. Indeed, here, out of respect for Great Britain, there had been a minimum of this necessary disruption.

Those who had come from far-off parts of Russia or from abroad but were wealthy enough to rent apartments overlooking the parade, had to pay a rent of up to 2500 rubles. Hotel rooms were hard to find. The government had occupied most of them. Whole floors were needed for foreign princes and princesses, diplomatic representatives, noblemen, or honored artists, and needless to add, honored tycoons. The French, being determined for diplomatic reasons to leave their imprint on the occasion, would spend 200,000 rubles. That would help to fortify their position as the great and good ally of the Tsar. Since that had once been the Germans' role, Cousin Willy's diplomats responded by moving out of Moscow to a palace

in the woods costing only 7000 rubles, a modest gem, but then the Germans did not even give a ball, just a musicale. They may also have been gambling on bad weather. However, the procession on May 9th had beautiful skies, and the heavens stayed open and sunny all week, a rare sequence for Moscow.

The procession itself was judged by most to be comparable to the most splendid formal events of history. Nicky and Alix would make their entrance into the Spassky Gate from a temporary residence in Petrovsky Park, some miles away. The parade route would extend from the northern outskirts of Moscow to the Kremlin itself, and a quick sense of the occasion can be glimpsed in the diary of Konstantin Romanov, a cousin of the Grand Dukes.

KR Diary May 9

What exultation! The first salute sounded signaling that the Tsar had left Petrovsky Palace, the bells rang out even more joyfully. Everyone removed their hats and crossed themselves. And then through the Spassky gates, the head of the procession came into sight, His Majesty's own escort, then the sovereign cossacks, behind them the Tsar's hunt, the court musicians and finally the golden coaches. The procession stretched for a long, long way, the golden coaches and carriages, the embroidered uniforms, the horses covered

with golden cloths. The Emperor appeared on a white horse holding his hat in his hand. Without waiting for his greeting, the troops welcomed him with an enormous roar.

In the crowd, many were praying, many made the sign of the cross as the Emperor passed. The Empress Marie cried the whole time in her golden carriage. It was too painful for her to remember how 13 years ago she had participated in the same celebration with her beloved husband.

The above does not, of course, include the calculations that had gone into each detail of the ceremonies on that day. High ministers of state had debated among themselves as to which diplomatic and economic elements were to be most respected. Half of the uniformed and ambassadorial cadres of the world had come to Moscow. Delegations not only arrived from every European country but from Asia as well—no mean trip if one starts in Korea or Siam. Of course, it was no secret that this Coronation looked to equal the majestic entry of Louis XIV into Reims in 1654. So, on the morning of May 9th, came a host of processions in full panoply, there to exhibit to the world all the exceptional resources and peoples of the Russian Empire. First came

the Cossacks with their scarlet tunics, their silver epaulettes, blue pants and black boots; on came Asian princes from unpronounceable regions, wearing costumes of a variety beyond description, representatives of all the distant barbarians whom the Russians had conquered over the last several centuries. They were followed by a regiment of Court footmen, courtiers, and imperial huntsmen. A loftier note was struck by a procession of the two Grand Masters of the Coronation Ceremonies, the Arch Grand Master and his court, twelve Chamberlains and twenty-five Gentlemen of the Chamber, plus the Marshalls of the Court, and all the members of the Council of Empire followed in succession by the regiments of the Royal Army, then Nicky himself, born, as all too many were whispering, on the sixth of May. Thousands of Russians were passing such information to each other, for May 6 was the Orthodox Feast Day of St. Job the Sufferer, one of the most sinister dates to occupy on the calendar. Who could ever wish to repeat the foredoomed sufferings of St. Job?

Nicky was aware of this omen. In the first weeks of their betrothal, he had felt it was his duty to warn Alix. He could do no less. And she replied that it would now be her duty to stand beside him. In union with

each other, they would overcome any and all of such dire signs. This was their test received from God. So she saw it. Yes, God wanted them to love each other so well that they could incarnate His Powers of transcendence. They would not have to suffer, therefore, like Job. They were ready to love God even more than St. Job had loved Him.

Just so much did I learn on the day they entered the Kremlin. I had been able at last to enter Nicky's mind. Very much to my surprise, I must also admit. Never, as I have related, had there been in my experience so great a cordon of angels surrounding any other human being. Just so closely did the Cudgels protect Nicky and Alix. Yet, on this day, when he rode his English mare all the way from Petrovsky Park to the Spassky Gates of the Kremlin, I was able to approach the entrance to his thoughts. Be certain, it was but a minor entry. Nonetheless, the approaches were not wholly barricaded. Leave it to the Maestro! Ten years ago when the Tsarevitch was an eighteen-year-old cadet, he had a short but agreeably lustful set of encounters with one of our long-term devils. She had coupled with Nicky in the form of a gypsy prostitute, a tsvigane. It was all accomplished years before the Cudgels had begun to devote their massive

efforts to protect him. So the Maestro had succeeded in obtaining some ingress into Nicky's soul. Be certain!—many skirmishes and small wars have taken place since concerning this modest and most narrow route. The D.K. had sent a cohort of angels to seal it off but the Maestro had succeeded—with what skill!—in keeping it open.

My honor—which is to say, my now much-improved sense of my importance—was that the Maestro had invited me to use this invaluable passage during the two hours it would take for Nicholas the Second to parade his horse up Tverskaya Street to the Kremlin. Who else among us was included, I cannot say. I may have been the only one. In any event, I was told to initiate nothing. I was to pick up the passing thoughts in Nicky's head, but not undertake any effort which might incite a headache in our subject. That would alert the Cudgels.

I obeyed. It was a privilege. On the other hand, there were few surprises. Nicky's letters had prepared me for the quality of passing moments in his mind.

All the same, I was disappointed. I knew that Nicky was decent within his limitations, but in no way, remarkable. When in the military,

given his future eminence, he had risen to the rank of Colonel in the Life Guards. Now, I did find it interesting that as he set out on the Processional, he saw himself again as just that, a very young Colonel. I must say he knew his own desires sufficiently to recognize that he would have been happier if he could have spent his life at that rank. Certainly, the enthusiasm of the troops as they saluted him with a great roar on this day of parade, provided not only a joy, but a pang. The Crown was going to be placed on his head in five days. After that, he would have to give a full farewell to old but rousing memories. In no way could he ever see himself again as a young Colonel.

I did have one surprise. His recollections now turned openly libidinous. If the Maestro had installed one devil of a whore in his heart, she was still calling to him. Each great cheer from the troops stirred a tumult in his groin. His English mare, so elegant, so pale in color, also seemed alert to his priapism. His wonderful horse with her exquisite sense of dressage now began to offer a new set of fancy steps. How she pranced!

After no more than another minute, these good spirits, shared by horse and rider, were however thrust back into gloom. One thought and

quick woe! To be born on the Feast Day of St. Job the Sufferer! What, indeed, had God intended? Why had He scourged poor Job's body? Job had prayed to God with saintly intensity yet his suffering had not abated. And in five days, he, Nicky, would be obliged in his turn to look to God for comparable guidance.

Yet, just as quickly, Nicky's good mood came back. I could only do my best to follow. I will confess that his thoughts came to me in confusing bits and bursts, with stops, full of clatter and echo, but then, even his dark mood could not remain morose in the face of this promenade. So many decorations had been hung upon the facades of the homes and buildings on Tverskaya Street. Moscow, on this morning, contrary to Gorky's remark, had the radiance of an old lady who had never been as beautiful before. A rare beauty. On most mornings, the face of Moscow could be ugly, but on this day of extravagant good weather, Moscow was so bright that it occasioned Nicky to think of glorious hunting days. Even Alexander III had seen fit to compliment his son's prowess in the forest. Nicky blushed on receiving so rare a compliment from his parent, and proceeded immediately

to give the credit to his hunting dogs. Whereupon, Tsar Alexander the Third had said, "One can measure a man by his dogs."

Yes, let the Almighty see him as the loyalest of His dogs. He knew animals, indeed, he knew them. Almost always, when drinking the blood of a stag just hunted down, the echo of the last shot still alive in the forest, he would feel close to God. The stag, so immaculate in form, had just sacrificed its existence. Why? For Nicky, the answer was simple but profound. This death of a beautiful beast would deliver closer understanding between God and man. For it was God who had given human beings the right to take the lives of lower creations despite their exquisite beauty. And, at this moment, in full parade, Nicky remembered a blasphemy that once had burned in his throat. It came as he drank his first cup of stag's blood. He had thought: "Is this blood not like Christ's blood? How else can it taste so pure?" Remembrance of such a blasphemy made him wince. It also made him think of duties yet to come. Which occasioned his sense of dread. For duty was like a cocked trap. He might feel close to God, he could certainly feel close to beautiful animals, but there were always ministers around, looking to use him. The loyalty of those ministers

would never go to him but to the aggrandizement of their office. Deceit was at their fingertips. Self-interest was in their skin.

He could withstand them. So, he told himself. He had a supreme trinity with which to protect himself. It had been his father's guide. Three principles—Honor, Tradition, and Service. All the same, that was not routine. To remain faithful to three such demanding principles demanded a strong ruler of great purpose, unyielding strength. Otherwise, Honor could turn into dishonor, Tradition stiffen into inflexibility, and Service be there to wear one out. Yes, these duties were detestable. And, yes, it could all go down to disaster. He was not equipped to deal with endless intrigues. Keeping up with his ministers was like falling through space.

Whereas to kill an animal, yet know compassion for the beast—such an act was marrow for the soul.

At this moment, his mare must have felt near enough to her master's thoughts to rear up. Had she just had a sight of the stag's blood? A cry of fear rose from the spectators as the mare stood on her hind legs. The crowd gasped. And then it applauded. All who were lining the streets, or perched high above up on the roofs of Tverskaya Street—those tens of thousands

who witnessed the moment offered a great wave of applause at Nicky's grace in restoring the confidence of the horse. A less skillful rider could have been thrown, but he had steadied the beast. High elation traveled through the crowd all the way up to the Spassky gate of the Kremlin. There were tens of thousands of spectators too far ahead on the route ahead to have seen it and so they could not know why they had heard such an oncoming roll of applause, but they too began to applaud as they heard the approbation moving toward them. And Nicky was flushed with pleasure at how nicely he calmed his horse. Had God been at his side? That was the place where he wanted Him to be.

No matter, his sense of doom just as reliable and soon returned. His future duty was still before him. He was doomed to aid and abet the projects of his ministers. Yet, they were as flimsy as a house of cards, one spineless construction perched on top of another. Now would they ever respect him. They were accustomed to the force of his father.

Already, their opinions had been perfectly able to override his own desire. He had not planned this procession. They had. Over and over, they had told him that this promenade would be his introduction to the world. In

consequence, the length was crucial. It must become the longest parade in history. And he must be seen toward the front of these many miles of procession. His mother and Alix, however, must be placed at the rear. They would ride in two separate golden coaches. This arrangement, the ministers insisted, would be a most dramatic way to demonstrate how great and near-to-endless was the extent of Russian power.

Alix had wanted, however, to be seated next to her Lovy. Nicky tried to explain the intentions of the ministers. Her criticism, now silent, remained in her eyes. It was one matter to feel like a dog before God, but quite another to suffer that sentiment when with one's wife. Nothing is worse for a hound who would be brave than to be told by the eye of the beloved that he is no more than a timid and conceivably ignoble creature.

-7-

Over the five days from May 9 to May 13th, Nicky was engaged in the worst sort of duties. On the 10th of May as well as on the 11th, he held ceremonial receptions. That required Alix and himself to stand in one place for hours. This ability to remain affable while not shifting one's feet, nor indicating strain, was a measure of royal competence. As each ambassador and celebrated envoy was presented, he had obliged himself to memorize who was to receive which side of his finest attention. As he complained afterward to Alix and to his mother, his cheeks were sore from being kissed by plenipotentiaries with stiff mustaches. Of course, he smiled gaily even as he complained to his women-folk. He would suggest that this was the

laughable part of the endless ironies of social life. But his face did smart.

His legs ached!

On the 12th of May, the banner of state had to be consecrated, which called for the royal couple to practice each step and verbal response in a intricate service. Between such moves, they stood in place, unmoving, regal.

On May 13th, sacred ornaments were transported to the throne hall of the Kremlin Palace. He did not know why, but a host of anxieties rose into his mood like a pestilence of small insects. He had been told that it would be an easy day, and the ceremonies were, by now, familiar, but he felt as if hell itself was waiting. He wanted nothing to go wrong on the 13th. For he saw the 14th as deliverance. By its end, he would be rid of his present condition. He would no longer be acting Tsar, but the consecrated Tsar. Himself! Wholly consecrated! Gloom descended. Something was bound to go wrong!

Having entered his mind once, I could now sense many of his thoughts by subtleties in his expression and I did not think these sentiments were wholly misplaced. I suspect he knew that something malign was in

the works. Did he feel that we were near? What he had no instinct for, was what the date might be. Each day from the tenth to the thirteenth seemed as dangerous to him as the next. He suffered through ceremony after ceremony, and was finally confused by the misplaced certainty of his intuition that the bad hour was near. Yet it did not arrive. Dread swells from a lack of corroboration.

For that matter, he was hardly alone in his dire anticipations. Given the firm Russian expectation that nothing good will prevail for long, there were many who were certain that all good weather would disappear by the morning of the Coronation. May 14th would see rain. Instead, Moscow was alive with early morning sunshine. All morose predictions had to be amended. Any number of women who had been quick to predict floods of downpour (that would be the fault of the new Tsarina) could now do no better than shake their heads. It would still go wrong. After all, Alix had been converted to Russian Orthodoxy so soon after the demise of Alexander III. These women now said, "She comes to us behind a coffin." Nonetheless, given the beatitude of this exceptional day, a counter-sentiment soon arose. Many were now saying, "We are close to the end of

the century. Maybe the new one, this Twentieth Centure, will be different. Let miracles of beauty and comfort come to us."

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Soon enough, I will be able to speak of the preparations we put together for our episode which would occur four days later on the 18th of May, but concerning the Coronation itself, I am not able to offer much that is my own. Given the skilled group we had on hand, I did, of course, receive a few insights on what passed through the mind of Nicholas II. But this time, the prevailing view still comes from diaries. Even earlier, on the 29th of April, a good fortnight before the Coronation, but already steeped in unhappy anticipation, Nicky had written to his mother,

**It seems to me that we should look upon all the
difficult ceremonies in Moscow as a great trial sent to**

us by God. . . The only thought that consoles me is that we will never have to perform the same rite again in our lives and henceforth, our existence will be smooth and even, I truly believe this, God will help us!

Not a good deal to go by. If I did not know better, I would have been vexed that the Maestro did not include me in the rare cadre of devils who would be present to infiltrate the Coronation. But I knew that the quickest route to his favor was to accept whichever position had been assigned. Folly to beg for more. Besides, he had even commended me privately for the action I had suggested, and added, "In the grand scheme of things, the Coronation is a petty event. You will miss nothing."

I was not present, therefore, in any of the cathedrals, not the Assumption, the Archangel, nor the Annunciation. I did not attend the banquet at the Kremlin Palace. In place of all the observations I could have made, I am now reduced to quoting from the diary of Konstantin Romanov. Unlike the Grand Dukes, he lives in a small palace, but it is most elegant,

and he certainly keeps a better journal than any of his relatives. Here, for instance, is his entry on the eve of the Coronation:

KR Diary May 13, 1896, Moscow

So the great day is at hand. The heart beats in anticipation as at something out of the ordinary, significant, full of deep meaning.

This is followed by a full account on May 14, 1896.

There was not a single cloud in the sky. The cathedral square was flooded with bright sunshine. High up in the blue skies, the swallows darted with shrill cries. It was already hot. The troops were forming up, the spectators taking their places in the stalls.

A roar from the square heralded Their Majesties procession. The priest went out to greet and asperge them with holy water. Then Their Majesties entered and bowed to the cathedral icons. The Emperor was concentrated. His face had an expression of piety and supplication. His whole countenance expressed majesty. The young Tsarina

is the embodiment of kindness and goodness, and the Dowager Empress looked as young as she did thirteen years ago on the day of her own Coronation.

When the Emperor and His Consort mounted their thrones, the attendants carrying their regalia blocked my view so I could not see anything. I could only glimpse the Emperor with difficulty as he recited the Credo. His assistant, Vladimir, helped him put on the large purple mantle. At this point, his large Andreev chain with the diamonds, broke.

The chain broke! I queried the devils, but was unable to determine whether we had anything to do with that little rupture. Given the number of Cudgels surrounding this ceremony, was it possible that we had managed to cause a induce so sacred as the Andreev to break? Or, was this a gift of chance? Like humans, devils will speak of good and bad nerves, of happy resolutions to serious questions—happy, at least, for us—and small dilemmas that can prove as unyielding as a burr you cannot locate in the seat of your garment. For us, the secret to keeping one's nerves in balance is to live with no unnecessary questions.

Since I will not know the answer, let me go back, at least, to KR's description:

I could just see as He raised the crown onto His own head and took the orb and the sceptre; but I could not see anything of the Empress kneeling before Him, for I was only able to catch sight of Him raising Her to Her feet, kissing Her. I could hardly hear the speech of the Metropolitan. I could hardly hear the prayers read by the Emperor as he kneeled. It was only when everybody went to their knees and the Emperor alone was standing, that I was able to gaze on Him.

A little later, when the ceremony was over, KR added this line:

The Emperor embraced me; I nearly burst into tears and said, "Christ be with you."

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"Christ be with you," KR had said, and there was everything to contemplate concerning those few words. There is, after all, such a labyrinth of relations between the Maestro and the Dummkopf, so many endless compromises, brutalities, games, and deceits on both sides. With it all, ongoing negotiations do continue between our best devils, and the Lord's most superior Cudgels, who, given the local case, are often His Russian Orthodox priests, still alive, still human, but wholly committed in advance to become Cudgels so soon as they pass out of their mortality. Such is the unwavering intensity of their living oath. Among our own schools of diabolical scholars, there is much contemplation of the mysteries

of priestly behavior, and the value of their ceremonial procedures fortified with their relics, their icons, their instruments of ascension such as the Chain, the Cross, the Crown, the Sceptre to be placed in the Tsar's right hand, and the Orb in his left, yes, all of that, and the Throne itself, resonant with blessings and curses, that same Throne upon which Tsar Michael Fyodorovitch sat in the year 1613. Who, then, can disavow the intensity of belief that is present? Who among these humans does not believe at the moment that an indispensable magic power bestowed by God has just entered the pores, the flesh, and the heart of the Tsar? But I would not state to a certainty that all of this immanence emanated from the Dummkopf Himself. The Maestro took pride, I knew, in smuggling his wares in among God's gifts.

At this moment, everyone in the Cathedral heard the hundred and one bells above and the hundred and one salvos fired outside by cannon—all of this to herald the perfection of the Unction.

Of course, we were also present. Each of these ceremonies would not only intensify an awareness of the spiritual, but would carry our spells. An unhappy marriage is still a marriage! The union proves even more binding

than the disharmony. So, I can say that we were not opposed to the force with which Nicky believed in His God. The Maestro, I knew, was prepared to turn that yet to our advantage, if not on this day, then over the years to come. But for now, let me do no more than follow the sacerdotal events on this unique day.

The procession set out from the Palace at half past ten, every step buried in the peals of a thousand church bells, some as light as the rustle of leaves, others as heavy as the groans that would issue from the heart of the metal itself. The priests and dignitaries inside Assumption Cathedral came out to the paradon to welcome the Monarchs who were sprinkled with holy water and presented the Holy Cross which they kissed. Once within, the Trinity was invoked—three times were prayers repeated, three times were the holy icons kissed. In the wake of this royal embrace, Nicky and Alix then ascended the steps of the dais in the center of the cathedral. We had had much to do with the building of every church here. We were present when Michael Fyodorovitch, the first Tsar of the Romanov dynasty, ascended to this same Throne, so I will not elaborate on how the Imperial Regalia were placed at their side, nor repeat the address of the Metropolitan

of St Petersburg as he importuned Nicholas II to make his public confession. (As if he would not!) And Nicky did make such a public confession in a voice spoken so low and with such brevity that no one could hear. Upon which, having concluded, the Tsar took the Holy Book and read the prayer for the day, to the chorus of the Metropolitan saying, "The blessing of the Holy Spirit be with thee. Amen."

All this would be tiresome to describe unless one is able to feel the approach of the Holy Spirit. (On many an occasion, however, His Blessing contains our gift as well. Or at the least—let me use the word—His Blessing is infiltrated with our spirit.) Indeed, it was at this point that the Chain of the Order of Saint Andrew broke even as the Tsar bowed his head to receive it. Of course, the priests ignored that small disaster. It was a rule of order among these Metropolitans never to indicate that any element in a sacred service has gone awry. Without pause, therefore, the Metropolitan, made the sign of the cross, laid his hands on the Tsar's head, and proceeded to enunciate two prayers, after which Nicholas the Second was able to take up the Crown, place it upon his own head, and proceed to hold the Sceptre to his right hand and the Orb in his left. He then introduced his royal

hindquarters to the seat of the throne of Tsar Michael Fyodorovitch. Whatever he felt from such ancient (if conceivably intimate) contact, he rose but a few moments later, handed over the Regalia to his attendants, and beckoned to Alix, who knelt before him on a crimson cushion, its border of golden lace. I will say that this lace even trembled delicately from the subtle weight of her knees—the light, I was told, reflected itself all the way out to the walls of the cathedral. Whereupon Nicky touched the Tsarina's head, just a touch, as if to anoint her.

The choir of the Cathedral possessed voices as close to the human notion of heaven as is attainable by a chorus. They sang, "We praise Thee, O God," and again cannon sounded—one more ongoing salvo from one hundred and one guns!

It continued. Orthodox service on grand occasions was never permitted to be short. To many, who were illumined at the commencement, weariness of the limbs did creep in. Boredom, profane boredom, entered the Divine Liturgy. No, not all were ready for Holy Unction, and yet I have to wonder if that is not part of the genius of Russian worship. For the length of the service captured many in the congregation who were without real

interest at the commencement. It was as if one never knew for certain when a heart was there to be captured. There is no real need, therefore, to enumerate So I will not enumerate all the steps taken by the Tsar and the Tsarina after their descent from the dais. A measured three paces here, then three there, the Trinity to be commemorated again and once again. For those who believed in the Father and in the Son could never be altogether at ease about the Holy Ghost. I know the Maestro always spoke well of the Trinity as if he knew something others did not. I have seen the best man at a wedding who, unknown to all but the bride, has had carnal knowledge of the lady, and there is a subtlety in the posture of such a fellow that I do not find dissimilar to the nuance of appreciation our Maestro is always offering to the Holy Ghost.

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On it went, the Tsar and his retinue moved from Assumption Cathedral to Archangel Cathedral where, with a few variations, the service was repeated, and then on to the Annunciation Cathedral. As much again.

I was told that after all this, the Tsar and Tsarina were in need of rest, but were facing a ceremonial meal in the Hall of Facets. In his diary, he would write that night, "All that happened in the Assumption Cathedral, though it seems but a dream, is not to be forgotten for life." To that he added, "We went to bed early." Whether this was from fatigue, or a resurgence of lust from the good and happy sense that it was done, and they would never have to do it again, I could not begin to say. How I would

have liked to have been in their room! At the least, I would have learned how much the corrupt sanctity—I use precisely those two words—the corrupt sanctity of these holy and possibly captured Metropolitans had to do with Nicky and Alix's raptures. No matter the extent of my desire, I could not learn how much the ceremonies performed by those most accomplished priests, had been able to serve some sweet, ever-soaring bubble of concupiscence between Nicky and Alix. I would not know, and so suffered all the pains of a devil. We are frantic when we feel excluded from knowledge of the humans to whom we have been assigned.

If it seems strange that I am always hungry to learn more, and if this seems at odds with the more common assumption that God and the devil have all the knowledge they need, I would suggest that the most elementary approach to comprehending my powers, is to assume that I am as much advanced beyond an accomplished scholar as he is more knowledgeable than a clod in a poorly-endowed school. Yet, this ratio established, I still do not begin to command answers to many a question that bedevils humankind. I, too, can be unmanned by the extent of all I do not know.

That night, occupied with my own preparations for the Peasants' Festival to take place four days later, I missed the banquet in the Palace of Facets. It was the event of the season for Moscow and for Russia—one of those social occasions that can offer great profit for the future if one has been invited—an orgy of social advancements for the richest of the nouveau riche.

Of course, there was also some detectable curdling of spirit among many of these ambitious souls. They were not always happy with where they were seated. This night took place, of course, before any notion of the A-list versus the B-list was introduced to present American society. Yet one certainly knew on taking one's place and studying the rest of the room exactly how high was one's status in the world—at least as Moscow saw it. Indeed, only the most elevated of the guests were fortunate enough to be placed in the same room as the Tsar and Tsarina. The cream of the diplomatic corps was there, the high clergy, the Holy Synod, the very highest of the court ladies, the Grand Marshal and the Grand Master of Ceremonies—they were all granted such privilege. The others, the B-list, had been sent to the Hall of Saint Vladimir. Nonetheless, a blunting of

ambition is the last punishment even the most naive of monarchs would think of arousing among dinner guests, and so Nicholas made a point, in company with Alexandra, of visiting every table in both rooms, followed by the Dowager Empress Marie, the Queen and Prince of Naples, the Duchess of Edinburgh, the Crown Prince of Sweden, Duchess Elisabeth and Grand Duke Alexei, yes, to table after table they proceeded all the way through the Hall of Saint Vladimir, and were in turn greeted at each table with the kind of happy ovation that could come only from the parched throats of people who had been ready to assume that no matter what they had gone through to obtain a high invitation, they were to be ignored. What applause then to see the Tsar and Tsarina approaching.

I will not describe the meal. It would not give me pleasure to carry on about the gold plate, the French dishes, the categories of caviar, the wines (French and Crimean), the vodka, the champagne. All banquets, no matter how fancy, succeed finally in generating the same gastric acids in those who have been blessed by an invitation. (Be it added that those who were not used to being personally served by three waiters in red coats with

gold trim, did tend to enjoy the repast.) The menus were illustrated, the Imperial Band played throughout dinner, and the Palace of Facets sparkled.

In that era, journalists were not encouraged to speak ill of the great and mighty. So they all declared that this banquet, a culmination of the Feast of Lights, would never be forgotten by posterity. The Palace of Facets was, after all, renowned for the rarity of its celebrations. Only the most important events in Russian history could open such ancient doors. Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great held their Coronation banquets here. One of the reporters from America, bewitched by the honor of attending (although I never learned whether she was in the front room or the rear) concluded her piece by adding:

**So ended the greatest day of our lives, the one
to be remembered for years. We all felt that we had
seen the grandest sight that could possibly be
imagined and we were pretty lucky mortals,
everything had gone so beautifully.**

She all but said, and then she did say, that such beauty introduced one "to the realm of the gods." Another American reporter, John Logan, stated

that he now believed not only in Russia's immense potential for grandeur, but in Nicholas' legitimacy. If there were those who would challenge his opinion, he, for one, would add that Russia was more prosperous and more peaceful than she had been for years.

The restlessness of the radicals seems to be soothed, let us hope permanently, and let us hope that all friends of true reform may find in the reign of Nicholas II the completion of all that is noble in Russian history as well as the dawn of an era of development and advancement. . .Nicholas II begins his reign with the good wishes of the entire world. Monarchies, empires, and republics alike united to wish him 'bon voyage' on his momentous journey. From Germany, from France, from a venerable Queen who has reigned longest in the history of England's throne, from our own President, and from many other rulers of nations great and small, he received messages of warmest greeting, and above all, the great heart of the common people with a single impulse felt that it has in the kindly, smiling face of this youthful Tsar the promise of a reign beneficial and just.

I had to wonder. The people who surrounded Nicky were so wealthy, and the multitude of peasants who had swarmed into the city were so poor, that I could not determine his sensitivity to this schism in his realm. A valuable opportunity had been lost. I had not come near enough to Nicholas the Second to be able to approach some understanding of the Dummkopf's hopes the young Tsar. I was hungry indeed for more. One of the disadvantages of being a devil is the manner in which we become obsessed, just so, with the need for insight.

West. The Minister of Finance under Alexander II, Prince Vyshnegradsky, declared that the country had no other choice. Grain was the only commodity Russia could offer to sell. So, enough of the harvest was exported to bring in the funds of 1891. Millions of peasants died of starvation.

Now, two years later hundreds of thousands of the descendants of those peasants had come to Moscow - -11- hundreds of miles away. Once arrived, they congregated at the various railroad stations in the city. Many

Certain aspects of the Coronation, however, were becoming more comprehensible to me. I could see why so many of the Nicky's most influential advisors had come to the conclusion that this Coronation had to surpass all remembrances of former grand celebrations in Europe. The ministers were facing gigantic problems: after all, Russia was immensely rich. It was also extraordinarily poor. If the country was ever to become an economic power comparable to Great Britain or to America, the rapid completion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, begun some years earlier, was paramount. Needing a large inflow of foreign funds to keep constructing that railroad, Russia had been obliged to export most of its grain to the

West. The Minister of Finance under Alexander III, Ivan Vyshnegradsky, declared that the country had no other choice. Grain was the only commodity Russia could offer in bulk. So, enough of the harvest was exported to bring on the famine of 1891. Millions of peasants died of starvation.

Now, five years later, hundreds of thousands of the descendants of these peasants had come to Moscow from hundreds of miles away. Once arrived, they congregated at the various railroad stations in the city. Many seemed to be sleeping there. This occasioned a mordant comment from the Maestro: "Of course the peasants are fascinated by railroad stations. Five years ago they watched all their grain being taken away on freight cars. Now, they wait at railroad stations to see what will come back."

Be assured, the peasants were of interest to us. Without their allegiance, how could Nicholas II retain his legitimacy? He could not count on the cities. The proletariat (so recently peasants themselves) now lived with overcrowded housing accompanied by cholera, typhus, syphilis, and tuberculosis. Alcoholism was the leading social problem, followed by prostitution.

Vishnegradsky's measures had, however, fulfilled their economic purpose. Investment in heavy industry did triple from 1890 to 1900. In balance to such growth, the sewers of Moscow flooded slum streets in summer and workers froze to death in winter—to be replaced by other workers. Peasants kept emigrating from the land to the city.

Those who stayed back in their villages lived in one-room log cabins. The insides had long been blackened by smoke. There were benches along the wall. There were also icons on the wall, cheap reproductions, long-faded, yet a visitor who came into the house would bow first to these holy representations. Only then would he greet the master of the house who was usually the oldest peasant in the room. As a master, he had the best place to sleep, which was on top of the oven, still warm from the remains of the fire that had heated the evening meal. The rest of the family slept on the floor. To undress was unheard of. When the room was not too cold, the men might take off their boots before lying down. They had a saying: "The reek of your feet will shoo the flies," but mothers lived in terror that newborn infants could be driven into madness by horse-fly bites.

Nonetheless, there was a quality in these peasants that I found moving. I respected them more than I thought I might. The women particularly—they were all old before their time, lined, misshapen, and yet many were as strong as draft animals. And at the main railroad station, through which I passed for a look, I was struck by how they rarely moved, neither men nor women. They bore no resemblance to city people who wait at the station—no, at their worst, at their least, they still showed the marks of the famine of 1891. They had so little sense of their importance that one could not even speak of them as humble. Rather, they had the patience of cattle. Yet, this did give me an intimation of why the Dummkopf was devoting His attention to Russia and the Russians. In all these poor, ugly, big, strong, dumb men and their plain sturdy mates, there was still a sense of future potential. Since our aim is to reduce human possibilities, we also look to develop our perception of those humans in whom promise might be buried. There was an interesting undercurrent to be sensed here. These peasants might be mean, small-minded, ignorant, bewildered, even stupefied, but all that might amount to no more than protective wax over a fine jelly in a jar. Beneath their torpor, behind their stupidities, I could

sense a capacity to be strong, wise, generous, fair, loyal, yes, even understanding. Was that why Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky so harranged their readers? Was there buried genius to be found in the peasantry of Russia? We had even been ordered by the Maestro—the best of us, at any rate—to read Tolstoy and Chekhov and Dostoyevsky, and do so with large respect for their product. "Good writers are the only humans we are obliged to tolerate," the Maestro was fond of saying. Nietzsche was another of his favorites. He was fascinated by Nietzsche.

These days, however, the Maestro pays greater attention to the stars of television and the movie screen. Certainly, this is true in America.

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My day was arriving—the event that was to be our contribution to the festivities. As we knew, his ministers had advised Nicky that it would be wise to show generous concern for the peasants. Very soon after the Coronation, a peoples' fete would, therefore, take place. It would be vast. In the interim, Nicky and Alix, would be busy visiting the foreign military and statesmen still present.

So, it was not until May 18, that an immense gathering in Khodynskoe Field would honor all the peasants now in the city, a convening for those who had traveled hundreds of miles and, for a few, more than a thousand miles by railroad, by wagon, even on foot in order to be in

Moscow when the Tsarevitch became the Tsar. The event could demonstrate, therefore, the extent of Nicky's love for his peasants. It would celebrate their value. It would entertain them. Circus performers, singers and dancers, would appear, and at numerous stands and kiosks, gifts offered by the Tsar and Tsarina would be distributed. The great open stretches of Khodynskoe Field were ready to receive half a million souls. Four hundred thousand iron mugs, painted in red and gold, bearing Nicky's initials, would be given out free to the peasants. There would also be silk scarves for the women, ten thousand gallons of beer, and packages of food containing Russian bread, walnuts, sausage, cookies, and jams accompanied by a small book about the Coronation wrapped up in an embroidered handkerchief with the Tsar and Tsarina's initials.

We had done our best to tarnish the charm of some of these gifts. Our Russian agents, having worked for years with venal caterers, saw to it that many packages of food would be spoiled. That was an old practice.

To face the horde in the field, Nicky, Alexandra, and members of the court would arrive around midday prepared to sit in state on a Royal Pavilion most recently erected at one end of the parade ground. This Royal

Pavilion would offer places to a thousand notables. Nearby would be another pavilion with seats for an additional thousand men and women who would pay handsomely for the privilege.

Among a few officials, there was concern that there might not be enough police for the occasion. Only three officers had been assigned to oversee a total of one hundred and fifty Cossacks who would serve as enforcers. Needless to say, these three officers, being stalwarts in command of security, felt some unhappy anticipations. They had no more than one hundred and fifty Cossacks to control half a million people! Their commander applied for more guards, but received no help from the authorities. There is a shortage of available police, he was told. That was true. They were guarding every approach to the city. After all, the police had already expelled more than four thousand suspected radicals. Other large sums had been spent to maintain security during the processional into the city on May 9th, the ceremonial occasions that ensued, and the Coronation on the 14th. Now, it was the eighteenth of the month. The money available for security was depleted. Any precaution that did not concern the immediate protection of the Tsar was obliged, therefore, to

receive small attention. Of course, when the Tsar arrived at Khodynskoe Field, there would be companies of soldiers to protect him, but such a guard was not required the night before.

So, we were ready to take advantage. Thirteen years ago, following the Coronation of Alexander III, Khodynskoe Field had been the site for a peasants' festival. Several unhappy episodes had taken the lives of thirty peasants, but that was an acceptable loss. One could not be held accountable for every minor mishap in so large a gathering.

Indeed, it was Nicky who decided to hold the Peasants' Festival in the same place. He wanted to initiate a new tradition. "From what you tell me," he said, "we need more and more of such traditions, do we not?" A murmur of approbation came up from his ministers at this remark and that determined the matter for him.

One problem that had not been examined sufficiently, however, was the field itself. In 1891, a large exhibition had been held there, and a good deal of temporary construction had been put up. Afterward, no funds were available in the city treasury for restoring the excavations. So the surface of the field was now scarred with sand pits, sand holes, and un-capped wells.

Some of the pits were fifteen feet deep. Others were small chasms. A few gullies had been boarded over with planks which could yet prove a hazard. They were flimsy. Broad paths had been laid out between these obstacles and it was assumed that people would move along prudently, indeed, there was enough level ground for half a million visitors. Since Khodynskoe Field was the Tsar's preference, no minister was ready to dwell on its drawbacks.

In truth, there were other immediate concerns. How were the multitudes who would come to Moscow ever be sheltered? Some peasants might have family members who worked in factories, and so could take them in. Peasants were used to sleeping on the floor. The grease of sheep-skin jackets and sweat-ridden capes, caftans, and black woolen coats, might add to the reek of the tenement, but what was new about that? Moreover, there was not a monastery in Moscow which would not offer food to the pilgrims. And, of course, there were the railroad stations. In any case, wherever they had been staying, a great number of poor visitors came early to the field on the night before the Festival. By evening, hordes were already installed on the ground. Some said these early arrivals added up to

one hundred thousand, other officials estimated so many as three hundred thousand. There was drinking, there was singing, there were bonfires. Balalaikas were played. And the word was out. Gifts would be given out early. We had disseminated a rumor that the best presents would be set out for distribution at dawn. Thousands of peasants moved up, therefore, in the middle of the night. Wooden barriers shielded the huts and kiosks and counters that would show the gifts, but before long, many began pressing on these barriers, and, in turn, were being shoved from behind. Then, a couple of hours before first morning light, some good part of the working populace of Moscow began to arrive. The slums were marching in. They had also heard the rumor.

Back in the city on this night of the 17th, a gala took place at the Bolshoi Theatre. There were so many ladies bearing their finest diamonds that the glow of the gems—as many remarked—could compete with the sparkle of the footlights. Yet, at intermission, many of the gentry were talking about the Field. It was said that one million souls would throng to Khodynskoe. One million souls! "Yes," was the word at the Bolshoi gala,

"Never before have so many of the common people turned out to offer their reverence to the Tsar."

Actually, the distribution of the gifts was not scheduled to begin before ten in the morning, two hours before Nicholas II would arrive with the Tsarina. But the Cossacks plus the few police on hand were already concerned about the crowd. They were pressing too hard against the barriers. There was a dreadful restlessness. Peasants had begun rocking the posts that supported the barriers. Many in our cohort were at work inspiring rumors. "The good stuff is gone," we had prompted them to say. So, even before daylight, it did not seem likely that the fences would hold.

Rumors now piled up like building blocks, lie upon lie! "The mugs are gone. The beer is gone." "No," went a counter-rumor, "the beer is not gone, but there is very little left." The first barriers began to tilt. The moment they were knocked down, the nearest kiosks were overrun. Even as they were reaching for the gifts, peasants were being knocked to the ground. Others, rushing forward, stepped over them. And the crowds kept surging up from the ranks to the rear. A compressed mass of humans was now jamming forward into the thousands who were up front by the booths.

A man had no more than to stumble and another would trip over him. A third would be knocked down, a fourth would be felled as other bodies crammed forward. Women would scream. Children began to wail. Then it was worse. Hordes were being shoved, propelled, and driven down into the largest of the sand pits, and there they churned in a hurly-burly of grips and twists as they searched for enough leverage to climb out of the pit even as others were falling on top of them. Bodies drove down upon bodies that ground down on those beneath. I had never heard such woe. Thousands of throats were roaring with rage, other thousands were screaming. Soon, the sounds were unearthly. Smaller people were thrown upward like spray. A few bodies were propelled into the air. Children cried out under the weight of boots clambering over them. Who could count how many thousands of heels were trampling upon ten hundred torsos? Some were even saved. Some! A few women, a few children were lifted and passed from arm to arm overhead to avoid the crush overtaking them. The few who reached the edge of the crowd collapsed like minnows in the shallows, not able to breathe nor stir, then able to breathe, or just about. Along the edges,

Some were hysterical. They would laugh at one moment, groan on the next.

onlookers were braying out the names of family members. Some showed faces petrified by grief. Already!

It came to an end in much the manner that a storm dies down. Those who had broken through to the booths and trampled over the kiosks continued to be moved forward by others behind them, until finally they reached one end of the field. Others wedged their way off to the side. Some in the rear, hearing the high note of screams up ahead, drew back. They pushed no longer. As the storm abated, peasants moved off in four directions. The dead lay on the ground and in the pits.

In these early hours of daylight, the fallen were still quivering in chaos, but the disorder had spread already to the streets and avenues of Moscow. Tens of thousands of Muscovites who had been planning to be present at the official opening scheduled for ten in the morning chose to leave their homes early. Now, as they approached on foot, wagons were coming toward them carrying a burden of the dead, and these bloody wagons were accompanied by men and women wailing in grief. Relatives who had managed to find one of their fallen now trudged by, weeping. Some were hysterical. They would laugh at one moment, groan on the next.

Not knowing whether to consider themselves fortunate to have avoided the catastrophe, they also had to wonder if they were in peril of losing their souls. They kept feeling this unholy readiness to laugh. Yet how could they not laugh if the smallest, meanest part of them had not secretly despised the dead relative for years? Yes, by a little bit. Yes, it had all happened and yet, it could not possibly have happened.

Those who were still coming toward Khodynskoe grew bewildered. These faces, all these faces, coming off the field, screaming and sobbing. Grunts of hideous laughter came from some of them. Every wagon carried bodies in various stages of ruined peasant finery. Many of the dead still lay on the field with bloody noses, discolored faces, broken limbs, twisted bodies near to nude. On the wagons, more than a few had been wrapped in remnants of other people's clothes found on the ground, rags torn from the body of one corpse to cover the nakedness of another.

Later came estimates of how many lives had been lost. Nicky, when first told, heard that the number was three hundred, but his minister was well known for his habit of reducing any volume of bad news by ninety per

cent. Later, come nightfall, Nicky was told that it was 1300 people. The final toll was closer to three thousand.

Earlier, the first wagon-loads of unidentified dead bodies had been taken to Vagankovsky Cemetery. Until this hour, that ground had been kept for followers of Orthodoxy. On this morning, however, it could hardly be determined whether a given victim was certifiably Orthodox, and the first impulse of the police officials, before the dead had even been counted, was to get these bodies out before the Tsar arrived.

These promiscuous deliveries of unidentified corpses gave a further profit to our purpose. It proved a benefit not comprehended to its full extent by us until we come to the mass graves of the Second World War. But, I anticipate. It is too soon to speak of the Maestro's disruption of reincarnation by an excess of deaths too mingled with one another to permit any kind of judgment.

Along the route, many burial wagons took Tverskaya Street. The morning was reaching into its full glory. It was the tenth extraordinarily fine day in a row. The onion domes of the forty times forty churches of Moscow were resplendent in the sun. The domes, covered with gold leaf,

glowed as if they belonged to the sun, and their bells, celebrating this much-awaited peasants' event, offered their variety of clangor, loud or delicately toned. But to the ears of those walking away from the field, the sound of weeping, guttural misery and uncomprehending rage composed an unholy disharmony with the bells.

I, however, was in a state of arousal at the extent of our triumph (and even in some small wonder at the size of it). So, my senses were keen. I felt as if I could see into the failings of half the people I passed. So many of them were sick in heart, sick in soul, sick in stomach, lost in the vortex of a horrible dream that clung like slime to their spirit. Meanwhile, the sun reflected the gold of the onion domes above each church. For the past half year, laborers in high peril of slipping off the steep pitches of church roofs rimed in winter ice had labored nonetheless at fastening new leaf to these gilded domes.

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At noon, when the Tsar and Tsarina arrived, most of the litter on Khodynskoe Field had been cleared. There was still a scatter of torn clothing that lay on the sand and in the pits like a lower order of carnage, but the bodies had been removed, first by the police, and then by a regiment of soldiers quickly brought in. By now the last of the dead had been carried off to sheltered areas behind the outlying kiosks and hutches. There, the remains were laid out in orderly rows, there to sit until more wagons could be brought to stack them up for transport to the cemetery. Some relatives did come by before this occurred and there were shouts and screams of recognition but Nicky and Alix were far enough away not to live with such

sights or sounds. Besides, a chorus, long prepared, had been installed in front of the Royal Pavilion, and this group was composed of more than a thousand singers. For now, their voices prevailed. The several viewing stands were filled with distinguished foreigners and Muscovites in their best uniforms, the ladies in afternoon finery. Bunting was arrayed above the pavilion, flowers were everywhere, bursts of gaiety to reinforce the social principle that one must never give recognition to unpleasantness during a formal social occasion. I have been present at fetes, galas, or soirees when a guest, usually one of ours, unable to control himself, breaks wind. The repugnance of the odor is usually in direct proportion to the involuntary nature of the act, (plus the funds of our Satanic investment in the client's passageways.) Behold!—the pestilence sits in the air for a few moments. Sometimes, longer. No one remarks on it. For the social record, it has not happened. This ability to ignore the repellent has always been the ingrained strength of the upper classes.

Now, hearing a chorus of gifted voices one thousand strong offering a heavenly vocal collation to several thousand onlookers, no one is about to recognize that but a few hours ago, horrors occurred. No, the Russians,

given their pan-European desire to ape the best manners of the British, now looked to demonstrate how close they were in kinship to all those English ladies and gentlemen who might be glimpsed on a notable day at the races. The people in the stands looked perfect, and would have been, but for one surprise. An unbelievably strong wind blew up without warning, and it scattered clouds of dust all over the parade ground. This noxious whirlwind soon reached the pavilions at the edge of Khodynskoe. There should have been no such wind on so glorious a day. All had been still. Yet, the gust had come. I hardly knew if I was witnessing the fury of the Dummkopf or the rage of the dead.

On the tail of this wind, the Tsar and Tsarina arrived. Everything changed. It was as if the gale was ready to be dispelled by an uproar of cheers so loud one could barely hear the band, that immense orchestra of national brass as it played the anthem with stentorian exaltation. The pavilion guests bowed to left and to right, and waved their arms in salute. Khodynskoe Field was now only half visible in the dust as the near ground began to fill up from all the latecomers arriving safely now after the tumult of the morning. Soon enough, Nicky and Alexandra waved to new people

flocking in, and shortly after, left the pavilion to step into their carriage in order to be driven a few hundred yards to Petrovsky Palace where the Tsar was to receive selected groups of chosen citizens. In the glimpse I caught of him, he looked exceptionally pale and I wondered if he knew what had happened. I suspect his information was still highly imperfect, but in any event, the order of prearranged ceremonies was maintained. Not a quarter mile from Khodynskoe, Nicky and Alix now stood at the Petrovsky gates to receive these new delegations. There were fourteen in all. As I was later to learn, a special gift from the Cathedral of Christ the Savior was presented to Nicky and Alix first—a large platter for ceremonial bread and salt. Nine months had been spent by eight men carving this platter out of crystal. Nicky screwed up his buttocks to force a little gratitude into his expression, an act of forced charm detectable only to connoisseurs like myself. Then, he proceeded to thank the eight workers for the splendid niceties of their work. Next came a Cavalry regiment, the Georgiyevskys. A delegation of peasant women was followed by distinguished artists of the Moscow Imperial Theater. After which, a delegation from the Moscow coachmen paid their respects. There was even a showing of the Moscow All-Believers

who offered a silver platter on which Nicky's initials had been laid out in diamonds. They were soon replaced by an army of contractors who had decorated Moscow with lights and false fronts for the Processional on May 9th. Representatives of the caterers, plus the Society of the Hunt, the Moscow Racing Club, and even (for their centuries of service since the time of Peter the Great) a few of the leaders of the Moscow German colony came up to file by. After this, Nicky and Alix were able to enter the palace and preside over a feast for the common people. That is to say— the honored representatives of the common people. Inserting his remarks between choruses of cheers, Nicholas II spoke to these distinguished plebian elders: "The Empress and I heartily thank you for your expression of love and dedication. We do not doubt these feelings are shared by your fellow villagers. Care for your welfare is as close to my heart as it is to that of our Father and Beloved Savior."

I happened to look at the time. To me, this is no more than a phrase. I hardly needed a watch. But then, no devil, clothed or invisible, is ever without a clear sense of the instant. So I can state that at the exact moment when the Tsar was making this speech, an unsavory event occurred at the

morgue. (I know they were simultaneous events because a devil reported the exact time to me later.) Two of the corpses who had been carried from the transport wagons and laid out on the morgue tables, happened to rise up out of their comatose state. They even cried out in unison. From opposite ends of the room! They had been trampled near to death, and had appeared inert, but now they were obviously alive.

If I mention these upstarts, it is to emphasize the conjunction of the two occasions. I would even learn that Alix was suffering her own climax of foreboding at what had to be near to the same moment. For each of the guests who came forward, she had smiled and bobbed her head, still a pouter pigeon. But she was living in terror. She was filled with a thought that her own death was near and so was Nicky's. In what danger her husband lived! After such a hideous event, would Nicky not have to pay? And for the first time, she allowed herself to feel an open wrath against the Russian people. Why, she asked herself, had they had to riot? She even said to her husband, "There is so little courtesy among our Moujiks." Nicky did not know whether to be offended or pleased that she spoke of our Moujiks.

These thoughts, of course, I received at second hand from another of our special Russian devils who maintained his entree to one of Alix's ladies-in-waiting.

A half mile away from Petrovsky Palace, some soldiers were laying out the last of the victims, and on those far fringes of Khodynskoe Field, some hundreds of peasants and Muscovites kept searching for the members of their families who had disappeared earlier. Meanwhile, in the palace courtyard, Nicky went from table to table to offer greetings to the villagers as they ate their Poltava Borscht, their veal with fresh greens, cold whitefish, roast spring chicken, duckling, fresh and pickled cucumbers, dessert, fruit, wines.

Back on the field, there were new events to greet the late-comers. Gypsy dancers were performing. Bands. Jugglers. Ice cream was being sold. And behind the hutches, corpses were still being laid out in rows even as a few of the desperate kept looking for lost family, staring into the battered faces of humans who had perished hours ago but might, despite their disfigurement, still reveal some ravaged feature that was recognizable. A few even laid a copper coin on one or another stranger's chest. And in

some places, piles of bodies did remain. A heap of fifty here, twenty there, arms and legs at outraged angles, filthy clothing. Doctors knelt in the dust to see if they could detect anyone who was still breathing. All of a sudden, one of the dead was no longer to be counted upon as dead. He rose up. His wife, who had been weeping beside him, began to beat herself on the breast. "God is here!" she screamed, "God is here! God has saved you!" But another family, just fifty feet away, who had been covertly relieved at the demise of their long-lived family tyrant, were now shrieking. For that old wretch also opened his eyes. "The devil sent you back, you monster!" his wife cried out.

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It is time to explain a little more of my relation to the events at the field. Even as I was not present at the Coronation so was I not a leading actor during the riots just described. I had no more than the satisfaction that I had foreseen the advantages of entering this project and the Maestro had approved my intuition. If I assumed, therefore, that I would be one of the Maestro's field officers during the event, I was disabused of such a notion before I even came down to Moscow from St. Petersburg. The Maestro stated it directly: I was not sufficiently familiar with Russia to command the Muscovite devils we would use. Better, for you, suggested the Maestro, to keep a close watch on the Romanovs and their family discords. These are

bound to increase after our task is done. I had to recognize the value of the Maestro's choice. But I also knew (and this is where I felt the pang) that he had concluded I was not strong enough for the job. Which is to say—not pitiless enough. That pinched my vanity. I had hoped I was seen as capable of any sort of demanding task, high or low. Now, I had to recognize, and should have known it, that my assignment to study the letters would remain my basic role in Russia. All the same, this knowledge did prove of use in the aftermath of Khodynskoe. For it was not only those who perished in a muck of blood, flesh, broken bones, torn lace, and suffocation who had suffered depredations. So did the Romanovs.

One immediate result was the lowered efficiency of the Cudgels. There were now gaps in the circle of protection they formed around Nicky. I was able, for example, to approach within viewing distance of the Tsar when he and Alix showed up mid-day of May 18th to sit in the viewing stands. Given that passage which the Maestro had succeeded in keeping open to his thoughts, I could detect that Nicky was not only unseemly pale as he approached the pavilion, but that this pallor came from an unruly passion. I could feel its intensity. Some turn red with rage. He was pale

with unspoken fury. Like Alix, his primal displeasure was directed toward the peasants. How could they have been so ungrateful, and so self-destructive? Yet—heavy as chains lying upon his heart—was his duty to forgive them. They were his people. Could he call, however, upon himself to feel such a noble sentiment when he was marooned in anger? There were so many aspects to his fury. For he was equally enraged at the ineptitude of the police. And soon enough, he was also furious at himself. He could not be expected to watch over every detail, but nonetheless! Why had he not paid some attention to the arrangements for security? Much of this could have been prevented! Or was that true? Had the events been inevitable? Were his fortunes cursed? He did not know. He could hardly know. Later that night, before he attempted to sleep, he wrote in his diary:

Up till now, thank God, everything went perfectly but today a great sin has taken place. The crowd spending the night on the Khodynka meadow, in anticipation of the distribution of food and mugs, broke through the barrier and there was a terrible crush, during which it is terrible to say about 1300 people were trampled.

The news left an ugly impression. We lunched at 12:30 and then Alix and I went to the Khodynka to be present at the unfortunate popular celebration. There was nothing in particular to see; we looked out from the pavilion over the huge crowd surrounding the platform, where the national orchestra kept on playing the national anthem and "Be Glorified!"

I kept studying the phrase, "a great sin has taken place." I could not determine what that meant. Nor how he would react to his immediate duties. Yet, even on the afternoon of May 18th, Sergei Witte, who was considered to be the most practical statesman Russia could present in those years, sent word to the Tsar: "In respect for the dead, all festivities should be cancelled immediately." Then he added, "Most particularly, the French Ambassador's Ball." That, scheduled to take place on this very night of May 18th, had been planned as the largest social event of the Coronation.

The reply to Witte came from a man who held no small opinion of himself, nor his power. This was the Governor General of Moscow, the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, who was married to Alix's older sister,

Ella. He had taken over, among his many other duties, the position of Director of the Peasants' Festival. "The Tsar considers Khodynka a great disaster," Sergei Alexandrovitch replied to Witte by messenger, "but would inform you that in effect it was not so great a disaster that it should darken the Coronation holiday."

The older Grand Dukes, this Governor-General's brothers, were in accord. Their conclusion was unanimous. Their sentiments, I soon learned, were not shared by Nicky's cousins, the younger generation of Grand Dukes. Indeed, Nicky's dearest friend—his first cousin, Sandro, who was married to Nicky's sister Xenia—declared that the attitude of his uncles, these older Romanovs, this senior level of Grand Dukes, could only be described as monstrous. His brothers, the sons of grand Duke Mikhail, were in agreement. Passionate agreement. Nicky must not attend the French ball tonight. What an outrageous insult to the dead! Where was Russia's honor? Sandro said as much to Nicky. Our young Tsar, four days into his Coronation, did feel that he agreed with Sandro, but just then came Uncle Alexey into the room, and this Grand Duke was the oldest remaining brother of his dead father.

"Nicky," said Uncle Alexey, "surely you are aware that your cousins, these Mikhailovichi, and Sandro most particularly, are not people you should listen to. They are young and inexperienced. They are radical. They are silly. They are worse than silly! I tell you, they will never admit it to themselves, but they are siding with unholy forces. They wish to depose Sergei Alexandrovitch so they can put in one of their own as Governor-General of Moscow. Think what that will do to Sergei Alexandrovitch and to Ella. Your wife will be distraught that her beautiful sister Ella has to suffer this disgrace."

As quickly as these opinions were stated, so was I in the chamber to hear them. Again, the Cudgels were not about. Such a host of just-perished souls were in need of succor! (Perhaps the D.K. had dispatched them to the morgue!) This once, at any event, I found it not at all difficult to stay close to Nicky.

So, I heard Sandro's brother, Nicolai Alexandrovich. He spoke with eloquence so soon as Uncle Alexey had marched off. "Nicky, I beg of you, do not go to the French Ball tonight. Recognize what I am saying. Whether we like it or not, we are still living in the shadow of Versailles. Louis the

XVI and Marie Antoinette could dance all night because they were naïve. They could have no sense of the approaching storm. But we can. We know!

"Nicky, search into your heart. What happened, has happened. The blood of those men, those women, and those children will remain forever upon your reign. That is unfair, because you are good, you are kind. I know, if you could, you would revive the dead. But you cannot. So, Nicky, it is crucial that at the least, you must show your sympathy to their families. Your allegiance to them. Your respect. How can you allow the enemies of this regime—who are everywhere—to say that our young emperor danced while his slaughtered subjects were taken to Potter's Field?"

He had succeeded in reaching the center of Nicky's feelings. Nicky did not want to go to the Ball. But this most eloquent cousin did not have enough experience to maintain the early edge of his argument. He soon surrendered eloquence to rage. "Why, I would ask," he went on, "didn't Sergei Alexandrovitch anticipate how great was the need for police? Any fool could have told him." Soon enough, he was hinting that nasty tricks had been played with the funds set aside for Coronation events. He did not

know exactly what he was talking about, but I had heard as much myself. Could he have been listening to the same rumors I had come upon even before the Processional on May 9th? In Moscow, the word was out that the Governor-General was siphoning off Coronation funds to pay for his gambling debts. It was not true. Sergei Alexandrovitch happened not to be guilty of that. It was his assistant. (This assistant was not only in debt to the Crown, and to certain gamblers, but to us—he was one of our agents. So, it was this assistant who had initiated the rumor that it was the Governor-General.)

That was no money had been on hand to hire police the night before. Moreover, by way of several Colonels who also happened to be our clients, soldiers available for the occasion had been assigned to other gates of the city—of course!

Poor Nicky. If he had one weakness, it was that he could not hold two opposed ideas in his mind long enough to decide which argument had the most to offer. Just as he was in the midst of giving real attention to cousin Nikolai's fine speech, so two of his uncles came in on the echo. They proceeded to explain, and in the sharpest terms, that it would be an

insult of incomparable consequence should Nicky not be present. The French Embassy had made expensive preparations. The absence of the Tsar and Tsarina could initiate a serious change of climate between the two nations. "Nicky, we depend upon the French alliance. For that alone, you must attend the Ball. Besides, it would be a sign of great weakness not to appear. How would the French look upon you? The French do measure themselves by the strength of the sanity they can muster in the face of hysterical emotion. They detest sentimentality. They are proud of their froideur! They will not see you as a man, but as a womanly creature, a weakling in the worst way. Foreign policy must not be determined by unfortunate accidents. One should not be swayed by compassion. It is inimical to sound diplomacy."

Nicky attended the ball given by the French Ambassador. He had the first dance of the evening with Countess Montebello who was the wife of the French Ambassador, and Alix danced with the Count. In his diary, Nicky left this comment:

The Montebello Ball was very magnificently done, but the heat was unbearable. We left after supper at two o'clock.

One of the reasons he left may have been the smile on the face of the Governor-General of Moscow. Grand Duke Sergei was enjoying the Ball. He had a favorite saying: "It does not matter how awful the day has been. One must possess the character and the wit, to be able, when the music is lively and the drinks inspire, to enjoy an evening to the full. That is also our duty."

Sandro and his brothers had long been aware of Sergei's credo. He was known to quote himself. On this night, they found his person odious. So, all four brothers departed—they made a point of leaving at the exact moment that the dancing began. Uncle Alexey spoke out loudly: "There go the four imperial followers of Robespierre."

I was content. The Maestro would be pleased. He would also be amused, I was certain, when he learned that I had been able that night to insinuate myself into the Royal Chamber. That would hardly be believed. I

was in the Bedroom, yes! The Cudgels were in more disarray than I could ever recall.

So, for a few minutes, (before they came back and I had to decamp) I was able not only to peer just a little further into Nicky's mind but to feel close enough for one good instant to report that he felt doomed. Doomed and damned. He knew this with some certainty of vision. His vision, not ours. It would take more than to decades to confirm what he knew on that night. But that was the night when he knew. If I had it in me to feel sympathy (or for that matter could afford to), I might have been moved by how he suffered. He was truly appalled. He told Alix that it might be his duty to retire to a monastery where he could pray for the victims. It was no way to speak to a wife on a night so full of a sense of future disaster. It may even account for the letter Alix would yet write to her friend, the German Countess Rantzau.

**I feel that all who surround my husband are
insincere. And no one is doing his duty for Russia.
They are all serving him for their career and personal
advantage and I worry myself and cry for days on**

**end as I feel my husband is very young and
inexperienced—of which they are taking advantage.**

How much more she might have wept if she had known what ladies in Moscow were saying about her.

Before the Coronation, she had made a critical mistake. She had confided too much to her closest lady-in-waiting. She adored Nicky, Alix had confessed to her friend. "Not only for his heart, but for the other matters. I love him so much. I call him secret names. All kinds."

"What are these secret names?" asked the Lady-in-Waiting.

"Oh, I cannot tell you. They are secret. I call him many sweet words, usually in English. For me, that is such a warm language. So hospitable."

It came out. Bit by bit. At last, it was in the air—her secret. The big secret that the Lady-in-Waiting swore she would never pass on to a soul. And the Lady-in-Waiting did not—not for a day or two. Then she told it to only one trusted friend, and this lady swore in turn that she could be trusted altogether and forever.

In the event, this friend to the Lady-in-Waiting did not feel free to give the secret away at once. It took two nights before she told several trusted friends. They also took a vow of silence. They did not feel they must wait as long, however, to break their oath. Within the week, Moscow's society was snickering over the Tsarina's avowed love of English. Anyone who had a reputation for knowing what others did not know was now familiar with Alix and Nicky's intimate words for each other. "Lovy, Boysy, Sweet one, my soul," which Alix converted to Russian—dushki—also "mannikins mine, sweetie, pussy-mine."

They enjoyed laughing at Alix but sooner or later, one of the ladies would remind the others, "She comes to us from behind a coffin. She carries misfortune."

For that matter, the Governor-General of Moscow was now called "The Prince of Khodynka."

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In the week that followed the disaster, there were eight days of fetes, dances, receptions, state visits, and musicales. On May 19th, there was a banquet in Alexander Hall in the Kremlin, and on the 20th, Sergei gave his own ball. The 21st brought the Moscow nobility together at the Hall of Columns, Prince Trubetskoi as host. Four thousand guests appeared. On the 22nd, Nicky and Alix made a state visit to the Troisky-Sergeyevsky monastery, and on the morning of the 23rd, Nicky gave 20,000 rubles as a first installment on a children's home for the orphans of Khodynka. That evening, there was dinner with the English Ambassador at a palace ball in the St. Andrew Hall of the Kremlin. Thirty-one hundred guests. The

Germans, laying low, gave no more than a Musicale at their embassy next evening which was followed by a Palace dinner for all the ambassadors on the 25th. For conclusion, they were back at Khodynka Field on the 26th to witness a military review. Many of the ravines and pits had been filled by then. It was another brilliant day and Nicky's carriage was drawn by six white horses. Thirty-eight thousand, five hundred sixty-five enlisted men marched in company with 2,000 officers. Sixty-seven generals watched.

By now, I was awaiting orders to leave. I did not know if I could acclimate myself to Hafeld after these exceptional weeks in Russia, but the Maestro was quick to tell me: "Respect Hafeld. It is more important than you think."

There was no reason to believe or disbelieve him—his real opinion was, after all, concealed behind the mirrors of his impenetrable bearing.

I can say that on my arrival back to Austria, I did feel better than I had in years. Khodynka had come off as the finest major operation I had participated in for a long time. Indeed, I could not recall many times when we had spent our time as efficiently.

It is sad to say, but few devils are permitted to retain much memory—I think the Maestro employs the same principle as intelligence agencies. No one in intelligence is supposed to know anything about a project until there is a need to know. We, in turn, are not encouraged to remember what we will not use for a new project.

All the same, Khodynka remained in my memory and my morale was close to excellent. In dealing with this Hitler family a second time, it was less disturbing for me to accept the large interest of the Maestro. Following our success in Russia, I was ready to believe that his aims were large.

Filled now with a lightness of spirit altogether different from the heaviness that is requisite to being loyal without other choice, I felt elevated upon my return to Hafeld, and soon enough did cease to think often about Nicky, Alix, or any of the others. There was no need. If I was ever to be called back to Russia, and I expected that I might, all necessary recollections would be reconstituted for me.

Let me admit that was how it seemed at the time. I find it interesting now, as I write this book, to recognize how much I do recall, but then I was indeed sent back to Russia in 1908, and would remain there until the murder

of Rasputin eight years later—that incomparable Rasputin, a most exceptional client! He was able to work in the closest union with me, but did insist upon continuing in the service of one of the D.K.'s most astute Cudgels.

I will yet look to portray these exceptional events, but not until I can record what happened to Alois, Klara, and Adolf through the twelve years until 1908 when Adolf at the age of nineteen went off to Vienna and I, after a little while, was sent back to Russia to commence my exceptional cooperation with a human so holy and so demonic as Rasputin.

That is the route ahead. For the present, we are back at the farm. From here, I can see the road that leads to Der Alte's house.

BOOK IX

ALOIS JUNIOR

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There were matters waiting for me on the return to Hafeld, and the most pressing was the least routine. I had to convince Der Alte to burn one of his hives. This instruction was my direct response to a puzzling accident. Der Alte had been stung severely by his bees, so severely that I found him in bed with a cruelly swollen face! Several of the stings had come close to his eyes. Given Der Alte's skills, he could not comprehend how so embarrassing an event had occurred in the course of looking into one of his better hives! While attempting to replace the queen—she was showing the first unmistakable signs of final fatigue—he was attacked by her escort.

Der Alte had to subdue this revolt with his cigar which he happened to be smoking at the time (a gross procedure as far as he was concerned, worthy of amateurs like Alois Hitler) and he then proceeded to bury himself under his sheets, taking care not to lay the dirty linen over his ravaged face. So drastic a revolt of his creatures had not visited him in years. It aroused my paranoia—always there in full supply. You cannot be an effective devil without it—the Maestro will not put up with poor powers of anticipation. I had to assume, therefore, that the onslaught was a gift of the Cudgels, and since a question is equal to an answer in matters like this, I decided that Der Alte had to rid himself of the offending hive.

Upon receiving this order—which I passed into him as he slept—he did not fulfill the job. Not at once. A few days went by. That was not like Der Alte. Rarely did he fail to cater to me quickly. So, I alerted the Maestro. I did not wish to—I knew his attention was on the aftermath of Khodynka, but I made a decision, nonetheless, to file a report. One did not want to ignore inexplicable events no matter how minor they might appear. Indeed, word came back, and quickly. Yes, I was told, he must burn the hive. Again, I fixed this thought into Der Alte's sleep, but now with harsh

enough emphasis for him to know it could not be construed as a dream, but an imperative. All the same, our old fellow was full of dismay. He hesitated for another day. "Do it," I repeated in his sleep, "it will be good for you. Tomorrow is Sunday. That will augment the good effect. Sundays provide double value. But do not employ a sulphur bomb. Too many of the recalcitrants could survive. Rather, soak the hive with kerosene. Then proceed to light it, box and all."

He groaned in his sleep. "I cannot do that," said Der Alte. "The Langstroth cost me dearly."

"Burn it. That will make things better."

I was only following the instructions I had received. To lose the Langstroth box did seem excessive. It was, after all, a decent piece of cabinet-work. No matter—I did as I was told, and Der Alte obeyed me. He had to. At his age, he knew how deeply we were infiltrated into him. He had to live with intermittent terrors that were as real to his flesh as an ulcer. Death was close to his thoughts, sometimes as close as a caged beast in the next room. His fears, however, left me indifferent. It is hard not to feel contempt for old clients. They are so submissive. Of course, he did it.

What facilitated the act is that a good part of him was enraged at his bees for upsetting his sense of the given. Old habits can afford few shocks. One's sense of the given is more valuable in old age. When violated, one is prone to surprising rages.

Sunday morning, he laid the hive on the ground and doused it. Staring into the commotion that seethed up in its flames, he did begin to feel better. I was on the mark. It had been good for him. He was perspiring like a horse. After all, he was full of woe at the incineration itself—that did violate his professional instincts. He could have wept for his lost hive and those fine golden bees—all those innocents who were scorched into extinction with the guilty—but to his surprise, a rare sweetness returned to his loins. This was the first such sugaring of his body he had felt in years. Like many an old man, his lust had been confined to his head. It had been a long time since the physical accompaniment to a libidinous thought had been any more agreeable than a twinge for his groin.

I will mention in passing that Adi happened to be present at the burning. He, too, had been given a message in his sleep which he had no difficulty in accepting. So, he slipped away from Klara and Angela even as

they were preparing to go to church. His sly escape did not bother Klara exceptionally. It had happened several times already. Moreover, she enjoyed sitting in church on this rare occasion when Angela and herself were the only ones there. Adolf was no joy to bring along. If not squirming in his seat, he would commence a contest with his step-sister to see who could succeed in best pinching the other. On the sneak.

Yes, to be alone with Angela on Sunday morning allowed her to feel a little closer to her step-daughter. If the truth be witnessed, Klara was also content not to bring Edmund along, nor to be obliged to hold Paula at her breast through the service, hoping all the while she did not wish to be fed. Today, Alois had said he would remain with the two little ones. Klara could hardly believe such sudden generosity. Was he softening? Was that possible? It was certainly one more question I had to explore. But, first, let me dispose of Adi's relation to this burning of the bees. His toes tingled, his heart shook in its chamber, he did not know whether to scream or to roar with laughter—for him, it was a royal, thoroughgoing auto-da-fe, and he kept shrieking out of that unique junction of terror and delight that only a young boy can entertain at once. For now, I will say no more. Release

from the high excitement of living in Russia had left me a touch indolent. I did not, as yet, feel eager to re-enter the complexities of this particular six-year-old. My morale was, as I have said, in fine shape, but I did not want to put it to work so soon.

I have not mentioned this before, but during my first week in Moscow, I had been put in association with long-term resident Germans (half-Russian by now, or, at least, half-Muscovite) who worked for the Governor-General. They were well-positioned in Sergei Alexandrovitch's hierarchy of police officers, and were a great help to us at Khodynka. They had what was for them an unshakable (and most German) view of the Russian peasants who had bivouacked during Coronation week at the railroad stations. "They are animals," I was told, "the most suspicious people in the world, and the greediest. Or, that is, they would be the greediest, except they have nothing. So their greed is like fire. It leaves nothing behind. Any one of these fellows, if he is big enough and strong enough, has a secret belief. He thinks that should it come to it, he could kill a bear with his bare hands. He would certainly try."

So, yes, on my return to these modest duties in the Linz region of Austria, I knew that my existence would be simpler. I would no longer be dealing with humans who were like forces of nature. Nor did I feel, as I had before, that future work might be lacking in interest. Hafeld could offer its own revelations, and at this point, it was to my taste to gain understanding by way of the subtlety of the task. In consequence, I found myself growing more ready each day to go back to these simpler themes. Already I could witness a few changes in Alois' spirit, and, in itself, that was enough to engage me.

For one thing, Klara—no surprise!—was mistaken. Alois was not softening, not exactly. He had thought it was appropriate to spend a little time with the little ones, but the moment he was left on this particular Sunday with Edmund and Paula, he put the sleeping infant in her trundle bed, and told Edmund to stay with her and make certain she did not wake up. Alois had the ability to transfix a two-year-old boy into several hours of obedience by one look. So, yes, his son was now ready to do the impossible. Edmund would will the infant not to awaken. Be it said, that is also a function of the will, and it can even prevail upon some infants when

they are left in the care of polarized two-year-olds. Will! (It is almost as great a mystery as Time!)

So Alois did not mind staying at the farm with Edmund and Paula on this Sunday. (He knew Adolf would go off by himself, and Alois-Junior would be on the other side of the hill with Ulan.) Truth, he was looking forward to being alone. He wanted to meditate upon Der Alte's mishap. That event had left him feeling cozy. It was so curious. A dire expectation for himself seemed to have vanished. He had always expected to be the one savaged by the bees.

All through May, as the weather turned warm, Alois' recurring fear had been of losing his colonies. His dreams kept returning a vivid picture to him of himself up there, high in a tree. There he was, much too high, trying to charm a maddened swarm back to the ground and into their hive. The sad fact was that, having eaten well through the winter, he was now overweight. Indeed, he felt as over-stuffed as a man who has crammed 250 pounds into a 200-pound body. Where was his balance? It was as if he was being asked to walk a tight-rope. The fall could come at any moment.

Small surprise then, if this Sunday, he required time to unbend. Let his face go slack, his stomach rumble, his sphincter break a little wind. There had been too many weeks through the winter and now even into the spring when he became convinced—not for the first time in his life, but these days, so vividly—that he was going to fail in a serious activity, and this would wipe out some important part of him. Such an end had once seemed impossible. His vanity forbade it, that so-useful vanity which he had constructed from boyhood piece by piece, episode by good episode, each attached to the previous good memory, and, of course, he had fortified the whole of such a progression by the promotions of his career. (Not to mention his fornications!) But now? Where was the confidence? He had not gone to church on this Sunday, no more than any other. Of course not, not if he could help it. But now he did not know how long he could stay away. On this particular Sunday, he had even thought of going, yes, with Klara. First time since they had moved to Hafeld, yes.

The thought was anathema. To sit in a pew through the drivel! Such an act could wipe out his sense of himself as a man who refuses to live in fear of disaster—a man who does not shiver as others do. But these bees

had scared the hell out of him all year. Had they taken away the keystone of his pride? No one else he knew had ever been as ready to thumb his nose at bad omens. Certainly not anyone born like himself as a peasant.

Yet, just a week ago, his hands had begun to shake. Involuntarily. He could not hold his newspaper. That was because he had read a story about the death of a beekeeper. The man had not recovered from a crazy outbreak in his own hive.

In an effort to allay such fears, Alois had even paid Der Alte a visit at just the time when the old man was in his bed and at his weakest. Indeed, Der Alte actually burst into tears while describing his mishap. It left Alois with the same sense of cockeyed virtue that a younger brother can feel when he sees the older one cry—so often he has been abused by him!

Afterward, Alois was relieved of his fear for a few days. Air no longer entered his lungs like the oncoming trouble that sits in the ozone for the few minutes before a thunderstorm. It was as if the bolt had struck. Finally! Except that it was Der Alte who had been hit by it, not himself. Relief replaced his dread. That had been true for a few days. But now on this Sunday, he felt as if he was ready to fall back into it.

For certain. His dread was going to return. And he knew why. It was Alois-Junior. He had not felt right since the boy had come back. Yes, something was in the air. He could not be such a fool, he told himself, as to have been afraid of his bees just because he was feeling uneasy with his son. Yet, that might be the truth! Human beings were full of subterfuge. He certainly knew. He had learned as much at each Customs post. The tricks that some tried! He remembered a woman who wrapped her gifts in the folds of her black lingerie. A good looking woman. When caught by Alois, she was brassy enough to smile, and say, "You are so smart. The other officers were afraid to touch my private things."

"That," he told her, "is because most of my associates go to church. You did not have good luck this morning."

She laughed. He was tempted to let her off. Let her defray the cost of the fine by smuggling him into her thighs. But he hadn't allowed himself. A few rules he would not disregard.

All the same, this recollection kept him brooding about the nature of subterfuge. Back in the days when he could still enjoy a ride on a horse, there had usually been one or another steed who could rob some of his

confidence, something in their gait—as if, should they choose, you would find what felt like five legs under you, not four. You wouldn't know a damned thing about how to control that kind of spirit in the animal.

Yes, that was Alois-Junior. One could not feel total confidence in the boy.

On the other hand! To be a father who made so severe a judgment on a son, and might later be proved wrong? That could feel shameful. The immediate truth, and Klara kept talking about it all the time as if she did not know whether to believe her words or not, was that Junior did not seem to be the same boy who had gone away to work for Johann Poelzl. Her parents must have been good for him. His manners were nicer. He did not seem to be judging you all the time. Before, that was the worst thing about him, Klara said. He was like a friend who was warm to your face but would say something ugly so soon as you left. Klara had no proof, but she would swear that was how he used to be. Now, there was something nicer in him. Maybe. Before, if he had a fault, it was that he spent too much time riding Ulan. Of course, Klara announced, she was ready to put up with that. Better to ride over the hill than to start flirting with his own sister.

"What would you ever know about that?" Alois asked.

"I don't know about such things," said Klara. " But when I was young, I saw things. In certain families. It was not anything to talk about."

She was, at least, honest enough to flush a little as she spoke. Yet, what brought the blood to her face was that she and Alois were cousins. That was a little embarrassing. But not terribly wrong. The other possibility did not even exist for her. Nor, did it, for Alois. He never thought of her as his daughter.

This ability to wall up the most unpalatable facts about oneself can always elicit my admiration. I do not know if the inner construction of such a barrier is equal in complexity, let us say, to scaling the Alps, or, to the contrary, one is dealing with all the subterranea of labyrinths. Either way, the credit must go to the Dummkopf. He created the ban against incest—we certainly didn't—and so it became His task to protect humans from themselves.

I know that we lose certain advantages thereby. One truism about most men and women is that they are incapable of facing unpleasant truths

about themselves. Their ability to invent earth-moving machines may be an offshoot of their desire to cover over unseemly personal data.

We, on the contrary, often fail when we try to force a breach into the ego of certain powerful people. They have what can only be a God-given ability to conceal themselves from themselves. So I could appreciate how Klara and Alois were full of worry over how to cope with Alois-Junior. Perhaps they see his ego as impenetrable. The equal of a tycoon! And only fourteen!

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Yes, I, too, had been pondering the changes in Alois-Junior. On the face of it, he had improved. If manners were a guide, he had become a reasonable imitation of a trustworthy youth.

My lesser devils—those left behind—were now pleased to tell me that they had succeeded in making a copy of a short letter Johann Poelzl had sent back with Alois-Junior. It gave a definite and most decent opinion of the lad.

I wasn't certain about the validity of the letter, however. For one thing, it was not the original but their copy of the words. That voided one of my talents—I can obtain a good deal of insight by way of the strokes and

bends of a person's handwriting. Many an undisclosed corner of the soul is to be found in the pinch of a curved letter. Falsities stand out like acne.

As I have already indicated, these devils left behind in Hafeld were modest in performance, and so they were only able to lift Johann's letter from Klara's sewing basket long enough to transcribe a copy. With more skill, they could have forged a facsimile, and kept the original for us.

Bereft of the calligraphy, I looked to content myself with the words.

Esteemed daughter,

This I give to the boy. He will give it to you. Your mother says he is good boy. She will cry for missing him when he goes. That is what she says.

Tell your esteemed husband I can agree. Alois Junior is good. Very hard worker. Very good.

Your father,

Johann Poelzl

I was not ready to act upon my doubts. I could have put in a request for one of our nocturnals in Spital to pass through Johann's mind on a milk-

run, but decided to wait. Such a request be recorded—everything was—and could be seen as needless expenditure, particularly if the results were inconclusive. Given so devout a church-goer as Johann Poelzl, there might even be some mean old Cudgel our devil would have to face. (Not all of the excessively devout became our clients!)

Besides, I could learn as much as I needed about Alois-Junior now that I was back in Hafeld. If I had had to leave the devils I had taken to Russia, and did not know how long the Maestro might hold them, still, I had compensation. The ones who stayed here had, to my surprise, improved, despite all. The greater responsibility seemed to have worked out well. They were picking up our trade. One of them might even be ready for his first lessons in dream etching.

I will not, however, bother to describe my resident devils further. At present, a century and more has passed, and former devils offer no more to the pleasure of memory than mediocre songs. Our personalities lack human characteristics, after all. While a man or woman's presence is closely related to their body, and we gather insights thereby into a person by acquaintance with their lineaments, we devils are without bodies (except when it is

necessary to inhabit someone for a period, and then we look exactly like him or her.) So, our personality, when obliged to take human form, is no more than a temporary palette that bears more relation to changing a garment than exhibiting a personal style.

I find it more congenial, therefore, not to discuss our situation as devils other than to say that we find our happiest terrain in the land of the dream where—if we can afford the expenditure—we can become anyone we wish. Some of our improvisations even show talent. Our brilliance is our reward.

Indeed, if dreams dictated as much of human history as we desired, the Dummkopf would soon become the Maestro's retainer.

But we were nowhere near to such a point. Not in 1896. God was still the Lord of our immediate universe. Humans, animals, and plants continued to be His Creation. Nature, imperfect as it was, and on occasion, cataclysmic (due, I must repeat, to imperfections in His design) remained still within His command, His far-from-faultless command. Only the night belonged in good part to us.

The Maestro was so aware of this that he frowned upon any and all ecstasies of self-approbation with which irresponsible devils might congratulate themselves for terrors they had initiated by nightmare. The Maestro was rarely impressed with such success. "It is never enough," he tells us. "Dreams are evanescent. Control of events belongs to the day."

I was in accord. If the Maestro continued to maintain interest in the Hitlers of Hafeld, I looked then to comprehend his motives. His high hopes for this Adolf Hitler, while still mysterious to me, took on more immanence.

I did feel honored to be the Maestro's most trusted lieutenant on what seemed to be an important venture. Then I had to wonder if I might be adrift in my own spree of self-congratulation. I knew so little, finally, of the reaches, outposts, and centralities of the Maestro's domain. For all I could attest, our special six-year-old might be one of a hundred or a thousand prospects whom the Maestro was overseeing on no more than one or another remote likelihood that they would yet become useful human servants. The notion that my task might be of major importance had then its ups and downs, not only in the immediate seasons ahead, but for a full eighteen years until August, 1914, after which I had to take care of Adolf

through World War I. By then, there was no time to oversee anyone else. The Maestro made it clear. I was there to keep him alive through the immediate battles ahead. Woe to me if I failed.

I have not described, and do not feel any intention to list the numerous other activities, undertakings, and staff expenditures that the devil under my authority were engaged in through those parts of the Upper Danube province of Austria (which includes Linz and the Wachgau). By now, they are of no striking interest.

History has, however, underlined the pertinacity of the Maestro's projections into the future, and so as I take leave of my present situation in America as others in my understanding in the summer of 1895, it is with the added strength of motive that comes from the knowledge that such work

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I have not described, and do not feel any intention to list the numerous other activities, undertakings, and small explorations that the devils under my authority were engaged in through those parts of the Upper Danube province of Austria (which includes Linz and the Waldviertel). By now, they are of no striking interest.

History has, however, underlined the perspicacity of the Maestro's projections into the future, and so as I take leave of my present situation in America to return in my understanding to the summer of 1896, it is with the added strength of motive that comes from the knowledge that one's work

has been of significance, and every detail that is now recalled can not only be registered with newly polished perspicacity, but, indeed, ought to be.

I can assert, therefore, that Alois-Junior was demonstrating his considerable talent to charm whoever was in his immediate surroundings. For a time, he even succeeded in leavening the heavy suspicion that emanated from Alois-Senior's person for the first days after his son came back. When Senior was in a state of suspicion, he bore much likeness to a wall of oncoming bad weather, an unsettling affect he had often used at Customs when confronting a dubious tourist. Yet, such was the boy's charm—a nice combination of youth, health, intelligence, a touch of wit, and apparent good will—that Alois could not maintain such an overbearing psychic front for more than a few days. Indeed, Alois-Junior was showing fine interest in the bees. He had many good questions to ask.

Before long, Alois (quite despite himself!) was beginning to feel a rare happiness—he so seldom liked his children. Now, he did. One of them at any rate. He even began to give Alois a few of his best lectures on beekeeping, and so, before long, repeated all of his earlier speeches to Klara and Angela and Adi, plus his original monologues at the Linz taverns, to

which he could now add the newer ones at Fischlham where he played the resident expert from Hafeld. The boy picked it up so quickly that Alois had to dip into more advanced knowledge of the sort he had ingested from reading apiary journals. Finally, he was even presenting a few of Der Alte's finer insights as his own. The near-humanity of the bee! The delicacy and high inspiration of their lives. The boy kept taking it in. Moreover, he was deft when it came to working on the hives. Senior began to dream of a future where father and son might add colony to colony. This could become a true business.

One day, he was feeling so proud of Alois-Junior that he brought him along on a visit to Der Alte. He had hesitated before deciding on such a move—he certainly did not wish to be replaced as the local expert in Junior's estimation. On the other hand, he was also proud of his association with Der Alte, so learned a man, and yet so ready to treat him as an equal—that, too, might impress the boy.

The truth is that he was no longer all that uneasy about facing the bee-keeper's superiorities. He had been enriched by the hour when Der Alte had virtually wept in his arms. Now, he could face him as an equal.

Besides, he had once again a practical need to seek his advice. Alois' hives were ready, they were full of honey, and he had studied his manuals on the technique of honey-gathering, but, he did not feel as ready. In the old days, back at Passau and Linz, he had made a botch of it. The honey he gathered was ridden with too much wax, and—no matter his veil, gloves, and all—he had still received a few nasty bites where the cloth gaped on his neck and wrists.

Now, it would be closer to a major effort. He looked to sell the better part of this harvest, and he could hardly do so if his product was full of detritus. Even one dead fly would be a spoiler!

So, here he was seeking for advice again from the old goat, yet he could feel more tolerant. It was amazing to Alois how little he was offended on this occasion by the aroma of the hut—hell, Der Alte might know more about bees, but he, Alois, knew how to be a man and not burst into tears just because it all went wrong.

He took Alois-Junior with him, therefore, and Der Alte responded to the visit with warmth. He was happy not to be alone. His convalescence had been full of pain concerning his idea of himself, painful as a sharp light

in the eye. His pride had drooped under the weight of contemplating all that was missing in his life. Hermits cannot undergo excessive self-examination. It hardly matters whether they are hermits protected by the Cudgels, or in service to us, or, very occasionally, unaffiliated—although this last is virtually a feat considering the loneliness!—but in any event, such clients usually have to be taken at least once a year through a cleansing of their many near-dead old moods. For this last week, I had had to spend time on Der Alte. His spirit had all but collapsed with the knowledge that he could not see himself in any way as a social leader (which had been the most intense of his early ambitions.) He had no mate, no heirs, no real money. And his memory kept reminding him of men or women who had done him injuries which he had failed to pay back. Under it all, was the heavy disappointment that he had not arrived at any of the powers and distinctions to which his intelligence should have entitled him. As is so often true of the depression that follows an unexpected accident, he saw this affliction as a judgment on himself.

I made a point of being present during Alois' visit then, for I wanted to improve Der Alte's mood. If a client's thoughts are usually darkened by

us in order to drive them in a desired direction, so we also have the skill to absorb their black moods. We can lift a man out of his depression for an hour, even—if it comes to it—provide him with some joy. Usually, it is to our advantage to keep our humans reasonably well and alive in order that they continue to serve us. Indeed, there is a loss if they expire too soon. Very few can then be transformed into strong devils (unless they die young and in a true rage.) Given rigor mortis, most of our old clients either cease to exist—no soul is left!—or are reincarnated by the Dummkopf (who does not like to give up on any of His creatures, large or small, wise or foolish—which is one reason the world becomes more and more empowered by human mediocrity.)

This situation is, of course, not simple, since we, too, have to look to take what profit we can from mediocre arts, products, and trivial people.

All this may help to explain why I was looking to improve Der Alte's mood when Junior and Senior came to visit. Indeed, I was able to give him relief from his unhappiest thoughts. I even returned him to the notion that he was an attractive man. (Vanity is the human sentiment that is ready to come closest to illusions of infinity!) As a direct result, he felt powerfully

attracted to Alois-Junior. It was the first time in ten or fifteen years that he had so desired to make love to an adolescent.

"Honey-gathering! Of course!" Der Alte all but grunted when, after the introductions and the formal query about his health—"Couldn't feel better!"—they began to discuss the procedure.

In full form, intensely aware of the boy, and—provided with these fresh seedings of vanity, keen to how the boy might be aware of him—I had even taken pains to reduce the kidney reek in these quarters. Der Alte felt more than ready to launch into an exposition on the lesser-known aspects of honey-gathering.

"Yes," said my rejuvenated old fellow, "honey-gathering is an art in itself. I am so glad you two have come to me on this day because, truly, able as your father has become in his short period here at Hafeld—a brilliant man, your father!—nonetheless, the best of bee-keepers have to learn what is virtually a new vocation when, after the long winter and a kindly, warm spring that fulfills our hopes, the brood combs, having been fed their supply of honey by the good worker-bees assigned to them, are now hatched. That, if I may say, is a most pregnant moment in our vocation. The hives are

teeming. The old bees are out on flights and the youngsters are assigned to the innumerable tasks of housekeeping, one of which, for example, is to fill the empty wax combs with honey and cap them with a fine thin layer of wax. Specialists among the bees are assigned to do all that. Young Alois, it is like a miracle. Some of these young workers are newly-born, ten days old, but already we may think of them as craftsmen. The layer of wax that covers each tiny comb has no more thickness than good stout paper."

Alois restrained himself from saying, "I know that already," and winked instead at Junior. In advance, he had told the boy to be prepared to listen. "When it comes to his bees, Der Alte can only speak in full paragraphs, but in full pages. All you need do is nod. I know. I know in advance nine parts in ten of what he will say, but it is like fishing. Be patient, and you will get what you came looking for."

"So, yes," Der Alte now said, "the honey-gathering, if not done properly and in the time appropriate to it, can be a rude interruption of the work of the bees, a disturbance of tempo, you might say. The first question to ask oneself, therefore, is what will be the best time to remove your honey from the hives?" He held up a hand as if to police his own course of

exposition. "It is the late morning," said Der Alte. "That is definitely the best time. The hives are warm but not yet too hot. The worker bees are somnolent. I would go so far as to say that your little creatures might be taking a siesta at this time. They are, after all," and he laughed, "Italian bees."

To be courteous, Alois smiled. So did Junior.

"Well, then," said Der Alte, "we take the great step. For that, I will have to lend you an empty hive body."

"Is that because we will have to transfer the bees who are in the honey chamber?" asked Alois-Junior.

"Exactly," said Der Alte. "Your sense of anticipation is excellent. Your imagination is closely focused, I can see, on the particularities of this situation. Dear boy, you are in possession of a rare attribute."

"Yes," said Alois-Senior "he is a bright boy, but if I may venture my opinion, there is no way to separate honey-chamber bees from the honey unless one brings up a separator board."

"Of course," said Der Alte, "and so the first move, then. . .?"

"Locate the Queen," said Senior. "That's one thing you taught me."

He turned to Junior. "Yes, bees will panic when they do not know where their Queen is. To move them from one box to another, you have to transfer her as well."

"Exactly," said Der Alte. "I have shown your father how to locate the Queen. Then you must introduce a queen-cage"—he took a little box from his pocket the size of a deck of cards. "With this cage ready, you will use a queen-catching glass."

"Yes, my father has shown this to me. He even let me blow one of the queens from the catching glass into the cage."

"That is a nice procedure," said Der Alte. "In a year or so, however, when you become as highly accomplished as I expect, you will dispense with the cage. You will be able to pick up the queen with your fingers."

"Yes," said Alois-Senior " but don't try it in a hurry," and he made a gesture of slapping frantically at invisible bees as if to remind Der Alte how this bold procedure could invite a disaster.

"Just yesterday," said Der Alte, "I moved three of my queens into three separate hives. With my fingers. I could have used the catching-glass.

Undeniably, it is as your father suggests, a wise and more cautious procedure. But I am like an acrobat who has taken a serious fall. There is no solution but to get up on the tightrope again."

Der Alte was telling a lie. He had gone back to the catching-glass for these transfers, but as my experienced client, he was able to offer whole assurance on any subject, even when removed from the facts. His desire to approach a little nearer to Junior's admiration was all the impetus he needed.

"Whether one uses one's digital sensitivities or resorts to the catching-glass, the heart of the matter, nonetheless," he now said, "is that by means of the one-way door in the separator board, your bees will look to escape from the honey chamber into the brood chamber where you have relocated the Queen. How they will struggle with one another in their haste to use the exit and so be able to reunite with their lady. It is the kind of passion that reminds me of my youth."

He turned to Alois-Junior. "Ah, to be young again and on the hunt for a young woman. In the old days, nothing could stop me. Would you say there is anything that might stop you?"

"Yes," said Alois-Junior, "my father." All three laughed.

"You must listen to your father."

"I am prepared to," said the youth. He smiled warmly at Der Alte as if to separate out one concrete instant where they could feel connected to each other. Before the air between them could take on such emphasis, however, Alois-Junior made a point of adding, "I think you have confused me. Aren't all these bees little women?"

"Yes," said Der Alte, "in the technical sense, if we speak of their gender they are female, but, of course, they are not queens, so their generative organs are not developed. Consequently, they act like men. Some become guards. They defend all the gates in the hive. Some are warriors. Most of them are loyal, determined, hard-working. In that case, yes, they are like women, too. They live for the good of the hive. But they are like men in the manner that they worship the Queen."

"This is all wonderful to hear," said Alois-Senior "but I am still waiting to get my honey out of the hive."

"In that case," said Der Alte, "I will give you the secret key."

"Timing," said Alois-Senior. "You told us that."

"That is the general rule of thumb. But what is the real secret to timing? It is to wait until you hear an unmistakable sound of happiness rising from the hive. Exactly so! When the honey comb is full, and the bees know they have made good honey, why, they are ready to act like women again. They sing to each other. You must come to recognize this sound. They sing in joy. On the morning after you have heard this chorus of contentment, you are ready to lead all these good bees through the exit in the separator board into the chamber where you have moved the queen, and thereby the honey left behind will be ready for extraction. Come, I, in turn, will lead you outside. One of my hives is now singing this song of contentment."

I, too, went with them to hear it. I do not know if I would have interpreted the hum that entered my ears in just those words. The sound was unmistakably strong. It offered the intent ongoing sound of the dynamos in an electrical plant, that elevating yet fearsome hum which comes into human ears whenever one form of energy is converted to another. So much is taking place. A dominion is being obliged to enter another dominion. It is

the sound common to many motors. "How much we have done," these motors could be murmuring, "but where does it all go now?"

Der Alte's last injunction was to put the honey-chamber into a sealed box so soon as it was free of its bees. "Then you must take it indoors for the extraction. Into a good sealed room. That is because you must not attract any bees who may be out foraging. I cannot emphasize this enough," he said directly to Alois-Junior. "As you may not yet know, these divine creatures have two natures: total loyalty to their Queen, but whole greed for the honey itself. They will gorge on it anywhere they can find it, from any and all hives."

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Once given her instructions, Klara went to some pains to close all the window and door sills to their kitchen, by way of every rag at her disposal. She wore a white blouse and white apron for the occasion, and so did Angela. Alois-Senior even gave up his cigar. For the family, that was, indeed, an event. But Der Alte had warned him, "Cigar smoke does pacify our bees. But when it comes to their honey, beware. A cigar is always ready to insinuate itself into the taste."

Luther was, of course, banished from the kitchen. So were Adi, Edmund, and Paula, even if this occasioned a series of trips by Klara to the children's bedroom, each time removing the cloths piled up against the

doors, then replacing them on return. Perhaps she was protecting everything too much—I do not think one bee had gotten into in the house.

Otherwise, the task went well. As each frame was taken out of the hive-box, Alois-Senior proceeded with the pride of a surgeon. He pared the wax caps from the honey cells by way of his separator knife (not so thick as a chisel nor so flat as a spatula) but a tool designed to lift off the thin top layer of wax closing off each cell in the frame. Since there were two thousand cells each of the ten frames of the Langstroth box, and a cell was no wider in diameter than the fingernail of a child, one could hardly uncap them one at a time. That might have taken a week. Instead, Alois applied the separator knife to whole patches, stripping off swatches of top wax an inch wide and from three to four inches long. To his eye, it was like a skin which he, the surgeon, had to remove, yes, no mean skill required to strip this wax without damaging the cells beneath. He was beginning to take pleasure in the job. He would have made a good surgeon, he decided. Out of the corner of his eye, he was looking to see if Alois-Junior might also be admiring his command of the procedure.

I can add that the supposition he had a talent for bodily operations had begun to warm his loins. A woman once told him that a surgeon of her acquaintance was one of the two best lovers she had ever had. Alois was the other. How he had enjoyed that remark. Of course. He had no fear of the flesh and neither did a surgeon—brothers under the skin!

After a time, nicely pleased with himself, he handed the de-capping tool to Alois-Junior who proceeded, after mangling one swatch and then the next, to get better at the job. Soon, he was as deft as his father. This occasioned pride in Senior, and a touch of disappointment. To make it worse, Alois-Junior said, "This is as good as scraping icing off a cake."

"Watch out for the cells," said Alois-Senior. "Don't damage them with your big mouth."

Adi had been allowed into the room to watch, and Alois-Junior extended the de-capping tool toward his brother as if to say, "Want some?"

Klara reproved him on the instant. "Why are you offering your little brother a mouthful of wax? He could choke on it."

"No, no," said Alois-Junior "it is a legitimate offer. It is wax with honey sticking to it." He nodded. "I do not think that Adi would be so silly as to swallow the wax."

When Klara glared at him, Junior took a piece off the tool and proceeded to chew it vigorously himself, then extracted the residue from his mouth and nodded. Klara could only look away.

Soon, the task grew more difficult—they had to strip another layer of wax from the back side of the tray, the frames having been inserted vertically in order to leave room to build cells on both sides. To remove the second coating, however, took longer. More honey was lost. Some leaked from the front, and more from the rear. Soon enough, Klara had to take over. It was apparent that she had the cleverest fingers of them all.

It took a few hours. As each tray was uncapped, it had to be slotted into the honey extractor, where Angela was now at work turning the crank. With devotion, she followed her father's instructions. "Yes, yes, move slowly now as you start, yes, just as you are doing it. Look inside! The honey is beginning to come out of the combs. Keep it slow, yes. Don't

speed up on that crank. Not yet. Slow, Angela, slow." (He could have been driving a dray and calling to his horses.)

It proved a strain. The slower Angela went, the longer it took for centrifugal force to fling the honey onto the metal sides of the extractor bucket down whose walls it would drip to a funnel. But when she sped up, too much wax flew off with the honey.

Before long, Alois-Junior had to take over. He had a better sense of how to maintain the speed of the crank. There was silence in the kitchen as they tried to listen to the murmur of honey dripping down the walls of the extractor bucket.

By way of a petcock at the bottom, the honey was then gathered in a basin. Klara was prepared with a coarse sieve and a fine one. After which, she held everyone back. It was absolutely necessary, she told them, that she and Angela spend another hour filtering the product through cheesecloth. Moreover, she was determined to save the wax as well. Beeswax had real value. It could produce the finest grade of candles. So Mr. Rostenmeier had told her at the Fischlham store. Alois snorted. He could have told her that already, he said.

Adi was the most impatient. He wanted honey, he wanted to gorge. Not even his mother would permit this, however. "Be patient," she said, "the honey has to settle."

"It is there," he cried. "It wants us to taste it."

"No," she said, "it is full of bubbles."

"I don't care."

"You must. Bubbles make honey uncomfortable."

"They don't," said Adi. "I know."

"You don't. Air," said Klara, "is just as uncomfortable to the honey, as gas would be on your stomach." She had no idea whether this might be true, but she hardly cared. It felt true. Besides, it would be good for Adi to wait. Patience could strengthen his character.

Tears came into his eyes. As expected. Whenever he was denied, he was quick to weep.

"Think of this honey," she said to Adi. "It has gone through so much. Such a great deal. It was living in one place quietly and the bees were its friends. Now, they are gone and look at all that has happened. We have been shaking it and scraping it. Then we have been spinning it. Now, the

honey does not know where it is. Let it sit. We will wait. Tomorrow, we can have the party."

No party took place on the next day. Foam and bits of wax had collected on the surface of the honey. Klaus scraped it off carefully, but insisted all the same on postponing the feast.

For one thing, Klaus now stirred the honey each day. She was convinced this was necessary. When in the kitchen, she stirred it every ten minutes, and then dragooned Angelo and Junior, despite their protests, to fill in for her.

This, she told them, was to keep the honey from becoming hard. She remembered this from her childhood, she told them. Once in a while, she

reminded, a wild woman rather than her husband. Why not? One guess

is quite obvious. She had been a wild woman once.

Finally, she gave way to the alcohol and declared the honey to be ready. She still had outgivings. But they had their party. Alice Bender had considered saying that Alice Lou Kline was quick to get drunk and

"This is for the family," she said.

So they each took a spoon and stirred. -5-

She held in her hand and let it go by way of her forefinger. The others looked

at her. No party took place on the next day. Foam and bits of wax had collected on the surface of the honey. Klara scraped it off carefully, but insisted all the same on postponing the feast.

For one thing, Klara now stirred the honey each day. She was convinced this was necessary. When in the kitchen, she stirred it every ten minutes, and then dragooned Angela and Junior, despite their protests, to fill in for her.

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drinks for years. That had been the best. What a bitch! What a witch. Two

remarked, a wife can see farther than her husband. Why not? God gives His gifts to everyone.

Finally, she gave way to the chorus and declared the honey to be ready. She still had misgivings. But they had their party. Alois-Senior had considered inviting Der Alte but Klara was quick to veto such a notion. "This is for the family," she said.

So they each took a spoon and stood in a circle, all but Paula whom Klara held in her arms and fed by way of her forefinger. The others licked their spoons. Instantly, they were ready for more. Klara had baked a sponge cake and offered slices dipped into this communal trove, but Senior and Junior and Angela and Adi just kept licking their spoons, yield after yield.

It was as if they were drunk. All of them. In separate ways, but certainly each and every one was having an exceptional good time. For Alois, it was as special and highly particular as good French brandy (which he had tasted three times in his life.) Yes, this honey was magical. It gave him memories of Fanni, splendid memories he had not permitted himself to enjoy for years. That had been true heat. What a bitch! What a witch! Too

bad! She had paid a great price. To die so young. Could it not be said? She had loved him too much, and the thought of such an overabundance of love, excitement, and his old but so successful treacheries to Anna Glassl mixed well with the taste of the honey, yes, he might just as well be drunk.

And Klara, filled with notions of the illimitable panoply of God's gifts, thought again of a young fellow she had liked back in Spital when she was very young, even a year or two before Alois came to visit the farm, this uncle who would be her man for life. But the other fellow had been so nice. They had held hands once, although she had never kissed him, not even that. But this honey must have stolen into her heart because she realized now with all her heart—so beautiful a memory—that she had been so happy when she held hands with that farmer boy, happier than she had ever been with Alois. Such was life. One had to be careful. One could not live with honey every day. She was careful now to eat the cake and put down her spoon.

Alois-Junior was thinking of Der Alte. He felt such confidence in these thoughts. It had been in the way the old man looked at him. Eyes so moist. The old man had looked like he was ready to open his mouth and

wet his lips and do the thing some of the younger boys back in Spital had done for him already. Once or twice. Then, more than once or twice. The honey was telling him the truth. He had liked it. He had tried to get a girl to do it, but she had refused. Maybe it could happen now over the hill in Fischlham.

And now he remembered the older boys who had wanted him to do the same for them. One had even twisted his arm. When he yelled no, he wouldn't, this big fellow hit him in the stomach. He had been smart enough to throw up. That discouraged the big fellow. Now, maybe, he could enjoy something with Der Alte. It would get him ready for the girl he had in mind. Give her a ride on Ulan. Bareback.

Angela was off in her dream. The honey left her feeling nicer than she had ever felt. A sensation. So strong. She felt as if there were another person in her, someone new, someone good to feel. Was it right to feel this?

If the question now exists how it is possible for a devil like myself to enter the thoughts of this family when little Adolf is my only true client, I will give credit to the honey. We have among our gifts the power to invest many a substance with a trace of our presence. It takes no more. If we

respect such a faculty, if we keep it fresh, and are careful not to abuse such power, then that trace can, for a short period, enter the thoughts of a man or woman or child without involving us in the responsibility of investing them. This delicate link, carried off with finesse, can even be kept for a few hours. (How agreeable it would have been to offer Nicholas the Second one good taste of Alois' honey!) In any case, I suspect that was why Klara kept stirring the stuff for several days. By instinct, she wished to serve as an impromptu Cudgel against our inroads. Of course, the reverse occurred. Her interventions only intensified the property I had added to the honey.

I did not spend time with Edmund and Paula. Before it was over, the boy would gorge too much and soil his pants, and the baby had a touch of colic. But, that was later. At first, they kept smiling with such innocent glee that all the others were laughing at them.

Adi was the most interesting. As I anticipated, he went wild. The sweet had an effect on him equal to schnapps for Alois-Junior on an empty stomach. So Adi made a point of giving sticky kisses to Klara and Angela, delighting in their cries, and the panic with which they wiped his kisses off their mouths. Klara, particularly. To scrub her mouth was a reflex, but

when she saw a hitch in Adi's laughter, as if he had been so surprised by the detestation on her face that a first tear had to pop up in his eye, she caught the boy and kissed him with all the muscular intensity of a mother doing her duty, and Adi, not knowing whether he had been rewarded or further rebuked, snuck up on Angela with new honey on his mouth and a small gob on his index finger all the better to entwine her hair.

Angela bellowed and there was hatred in the sound. He had ripped her away from the delightful sensation that had been cavorting in her belly. But even as Angela was catching breath to scold him, Adi was prancing around Alois-Junior. That stalwart froze him with a look.

Edmund was left. Adi moved in behind, full of the power implicit in sneakiness itself, and left Edmund with so much honey on his head, that the two-year-old dropped some more caca into his pants, whereupon Adi went up to Klara, pointed at Edmund, and said, "Mother, I did not make messes like that when I was two years old. This Edmund, he is always dirty."

Thereby, he handed Angela her quick revenge. She was there on the spot to tell Klara what had happened, and proved so precise in her description, that Klara began to scold Adi with words she had not used

before, not to him. "This is a disgrace. Do you understand? It is a sin to be cruel to those who are smaller than you. How can you be so bad? God will punish you. He will punish all of us." She spoke with woe. She did not wish to spoil this splendid family occasion but must do it for the sake of the others, for Angela, and for poor little Edmund, dirty again. "How can you play such a trick?" she said to Adi. "Edmund loves you so much."

This time she actually did want to make Adi cry. Instead, she was the one with tears in her eyes. He—perhaps it was the honey—felt as important to himself as he had ever been in his six and a half years. He was enraged at these criticisms of himself. He glared at Angela. He whispered to his thoughts, "I will never forgive her. That is a fact!" And with it all, he was proud of himself. He had brought his mother to tears. "Let her cry for once. Not me. It is time for her to learn."

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I must now describe the carnal act of Alois-Junior and Der Alte. This is with some distaste. Be it understood, I am without moral judgments on these matters. Most devils are supposed to be interested in every form of the embrace, dedicated, casual, perverse, or, as the Americans say, missionary—"I got on top and whaled away." We are, of course, much more interested in sexual deeds that fall into no established fold. Routine practices—the Cudgels, I believe, would agree—are inimical to our purposes and to theirs. First sexual encounters, however, are rarely to be ignored. We speak of them as primes. The stakes tend to be larger. Few primes take place without some representative of the Maestro and the D.K.

in attendance. Fucking—to employ that most useful, all-but-cosmopolitan, and near-onomatopoetic word, (so close to the meats, slaps, and fats of the occasion)—is of real interest to both sides. Much can happen, and quickly! Old habits, whose presence in the psyche are as heavy as breastworks in trench warfare, can be razed. How can that not be of importance to the Cudgels and to ourselves?

Small surprise, then, if we are free of moral judgment, and alert to fresh estimates. Will this particular joining weaken our position or enhance it?

I was repelled this time by what took place. Der Alte, after a few habitual courtesies and social commonplaces, designed to shield his excessive pleasure, (and instant alarm) on seeing Alois-Junior at his door—what if it all turned out a disaster?—soon came to recognize (given decades of experience in these matters) that Alois-Junior was here for the precise gift Der Alte had dreamed of offering him ever since they met. "I am so glad you desired to visit," he repeated several times in the first few minutes, to which Alois finally replied, "I woke up this morning thinking about you. So, here I am."

The hitching post was some fifty feet away outside, but Der Alte could hear Ulan swishing his tail. He knew enough not to spend one second more in conversation, but moved over to Alois-Junior, knelt before him, laid his hand upon the boy's crotch. Whereupon—fierce Jack-in-the-box—Alois-Junior was on his feet, pants unbuttoned, and full of a happy, blood-filled organ, thrust it at once into Der Alte's mouth—poor old man!—those yearning, long-unemployed lips.

It was during the next moments that I became displeased. If I am free of moral judgment. I am hardly void of my notion of good taste, and Der Alte demeaned himself. To say it straight, he slobbered all over the boy, and spluttered raucously when Junior thrust a full discharge down his throat. Like a baby, Der Alte peed in his pants. It was a species of discharge—the best urination he'd had in months. Then he was all over Alois-Junior with kisses, plus a variety of verbal endearments I will not repeat here. "You taste sweet, your heart is good," is perhaps the most manageable example to offer, and, of course, the most absurd, for Alois-Junior did not have to be a client for me to perceive that his heart was cold. His concern was loyal to

himself. Like all such very young men, he was filled with disgust for this quondam partner, and left as soon as he could.

That took a few minutes. He had no wish to be entangled for the most part of an hour with endearments that sat on his skin like spider webs. On the other hand, his practical nature kept him present long enough not to insult Der Alte directly. That could interfere with a return visit. Who knew? If he did not succeed in the next few days in convincing one particular farm girl he had in mind, then back he would come to this old pot. Alois-Junior was the stuff out of which clients are made—at the age of fourteen, he already understood sex in a manner that was ideal for us—he would soon be adept at accumulating many a dominance by way of his priapic gifts. That we do appreciate. So many of our male clients have nondescript dicks. We never know when an erection will be there, ready to salute. That creates endless problems for us, but we can also manipulate whole or partial impotence into its own kind of effective instrument. For example, Adolf was to suffer prodigiously from such a condition through adolescence, war, and his early political manhood.

Alois-Junior was the opposite. Full of his father's blood, his natural interest was in women. He would have spent all his hours with them except for what he considered their built-in trap. Girls, like women, were too attached to family responsibility. Boys, to the contrary, were right there—good for getting rid of the constrictions of the groin. And very nice to command a boy, or, better, a grown man.

Yes, he would have been perfect as a client. We would have enhanced his powers. He could have served us in so many ways. My instructions, however, were to leave him alone. The Maestro's eyes were for Adolf. I understood. It is usually disruptive to work with two clients in one family. This is particularly true if they are apart in character. One devil, trying to tend to both, can be put at odds by their conflicting needs. Two separate devils overseeing two clients in one home, can be worse. Envy stirs between them. As the Maestro has been known to remark, one might as well ask two opera stars to be ready for close cooperation.

So, I stayed away from Alois-Junior. Soon enough, he did succeed in charming Greta Marie Schmidt, a strapping farm girl to whom he gave rides on Ulan. Before long, he had something like the same set of keys to her

private parts that Alois-Senior had had with Fanni when she was still a virgin. To use one more American vulgarism (I confess to an unseemly pleasure uttering them), Junior knew Greta Marie from "asshole to appetite." He had no desire to steal her virginity—that was her well-cocked trap. Moreover, he did not really like her. She was a touch too crude. So he went back to Der Alte. Despite the full-grown odors of the hut, some of those occasions were entertaining. Der Alte was full of langourous slides and inspired flutters of his tongue—all to the good for Junior, the pleasure-lover, but, of course, once done, Junior could barely look at him. The youth was as repulsed as myself by all that sobbing and gurgling. The sad truth was that Der Alte's tongue was preternaturally excited by the back door. Alois' buttocks began to feel like the portals to a bounteously endowed temple. He would wait until his pleasure rose high enough to be ready to explode, and then he would turn and give it all to the old boy's gullet. Afterward, he stood still as a statue again, doubly disgusted by the recognition that his father, Alois, was hopelessly in awe of Der Alte. "How well he can speak," his father had said.

But Der Alte was so ready to serve himself up. So how was he, Junior, to respect his father? All that awful, endless, nervousness about his bees? Always seeking advice from Der Alte. Now that the family had had its honey-feast, here was his father worrying already about when to extract the rest of the product from the remaining two hives.

A small but near-disaster was the upshot to this. I was not at all surprised. Alois-Junior managed to leave one of those cherished hives out in the sun. For no good reason. Distaste for his father.

Indeed, it had been a near-disaster. His father came upon it in late afternoon, touched the top, felt the heat of the wood under the glare of the sun, but recognized that the hive was not yet critically overheated. The bees were not swarming about in such a frenzy that they would damage themselves. He had come in time. Perhaps just in time. He carried the hive back to the shade.

"What were you thinking, idiot!" he shouted at Alois-Junior. The boy felt as if he had been pulled inside-out by the power of his father's voice. Such an angry power. It came with all the heft of a heavy, shattering blow. Anyone can lose all sense of themselves when

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Indeed, it had been a near-disaster. His father came upon it in time, touched the box, felt the heat of the wood under the glare of the sun, but recognized that the hive was not yet critically overheated. The bees were not whipping about in such a frenzy that they would damage themselves. He had come in time. Perhaps just in time. He carried the hive back to the shade.

"What were you thinking, idiot?" he shouted at Alois-Junior.

The boy felt as if he had been pulled inside-out by the power of his father's voice. Such an ugly power. It came with all the heft of a heavy thudding blow. Adolescents can lose all sense of themselves when

unfamiliar punishment assaults them. That is because they are not only full of airs, poses, and witless shows of temperament, but, worse! At bottom, they do not possess a real age. In that instant, Junior ceased to be a youth of fourteen. Till then, he had seen himself as "Fourteen," a clear concept, stark in its outlines. He had even pictured himself as XIV. But in truth, like many another, he possessed more than one set of years. He had the calculations of a twenty-year-old. Yet other corners of himself were as prone to self-betrayal as an eight-year-old caught in foolishness. Like leaving the hive in the sun. At this moment, he was so brutally divided that he felt full of tears.

He actually pleaded with his father. To his shame, he pleaded. "You have given me so much good information," he said. "So new and so stimulating, dear respected father." He slapped himself on the forehead. "I confess it may have been too much for my ignorant head. I made a mistake. I know that now. But I believed I was supposed to put the hive in the sun, yes, for a few minutes—no more!—so as to warm the honey-combs. It was so cold last night! For spring—so cold! I hope I did not make a terrible error."

A part of himself was writhing within. He could hear the sound of his voice, sliding off every grip he tried to keep on some semblance of manhood. So shrill! "You must forgive me, father. My mistake is an outrage. I cannot apologize sufficiently!"

He knew it was not enough. A massive weather-front had come up again in Alois-Senior—the stygian depths of suspicion. "Think of this, Alois," his father said, and so quietly, "Our bees, all these bees, do their work by obeying the rules." Then he glared at Junior until the boy looked away. "They do not have patience with those who are weak or lazy. Or too selfish to remember their immediate duties."

He took hold of Junior's chin. His eyes would not let go of the boy's eyes. He pinched him on the chin, his thumb and forefinger as cruel as a plier's claws. But the pain rallied the boy. Der Alte respected him more than Der Alte respected his father, this man who happened to be pinching him. That was so! The thought came into his eyes. Now, the exchange lasted long enough for the father to feel a clear relief when the boy finally nodded and looked away. But so soon as he walked away, Alois-Senior had to recognize that this altercation had taken a good deal from him. Much

more than expected. He felt as if a near-to-uncontrollable adolescent had been daring to glare back. What a strong one!

If this bothered his sense of himself as a father, more was soon to come. Now, it was Klara. She received a letter from her mother that killed all the confidence Klara had tried to gain from her father's earlier letter. Johann Poelzl's communication had spoken so well of Alois-Junior that she had willed herself to believe it. But, had she? So soon as she read her mother's words, she wondered how she could have thought for an instant that Junior had changed.

Of course, writing a letter had to be agony for Johanna. Klara knew that. From the age of nine, she had been the one to reply to the few letters that came to their house in Spital. Yet now, as if to emphasize the importance of this particular epistolary act, Johanna went on for a full page of the most painful halts and bumps. First, she insisted on listing Alois-Junior's virtues. He was so bright, very bright, she could tell that to anyone. Attractive, good to look at, she would say that too. Junior even brought back old memories of his father, your husband, Uncle Alois, back then when

your Uncle was so young, so attractive, a good young man, so responsible.

All those years ago.

"Klara, I tell you," she now wrote, "I have to worry. What have we sent to you? Junior is wild. I must use the word. Klara, we had to send young Alois back. Had to do that, yes. Johann even now must hire this other fellow for help. The new one is a drunk. We pay wages for a drunk. That is how much we lose by sending Junior back, but, Klara, still, this drunk is better than Junior. We are not so afraid. The boy was far away from our control."

Klara went to her sewing basket and took out the letter Johann Poelzl had written. Alois-Junior had handed the letter to her, yes, on the day he arrived. She searched the top shelf of a cupboard to retrieve an old letter from her father, one she had taken the pains to wrap in a ribbon. It had carried his blessing on the birth of Edmund. Now, so soon as she looked at it, she knew that piece of paper Alois-Junior had given her was not in her father's handwriting. The boy was the one who had written about how good the boy was. It was a forgery.

Re-reading her mother's letter, Klara had a knot in her chest. Johanna kept apologizing for her bad German. Poor mother!

Klara did not say anything to Alois-Senior. Not until well after dinner. In bed, a little while before they were ready to sleep, he had begun to complain about Alois-Junior.

"I can't get good work from him," said Alois. "I speak to him, and he does not react. Not to my satisfaction. He is off with the horse. I don't want to worry, but I do. He can get into trouble. He sees girls on the other side of the hill. In part, it is my fault. Perhaps it is because of my conclusion not to raise potatoes this spring. Now, there is not enough real work."

It was then that she told him about her mother's letter. He nodded. He merely nodded.

"What are you going to say to him?" she asked.

"I will think about it," he told her. "I must take my time. The next step could be of consequence."

She was infuriated. She could not sleep. There might as well have been a bug wandering in the bedclothes. If Alois was not ready to scold his

son, she would have to. But she could hardly be ready for this. It was his son, after all.

On the following evening, not long before supper, Alois-Junior began to act as if he now knew that Johanna's letter had come. It is the best explanation I can offer for why he chose to break an egg on Adi's head.

The occasion was simple enough. His girl, Greta Marie, had shown him a little more that afternoon of what she was really—a dull cow. So, the need for new endeavor was in his fingertips. Something new. Having felt like smacking Greta Marie around, the impulse now moved close to Angela. His sister was clucking again over her chickens, collecting each egg from each hen as if it were a gold ingot—plain, dirty, hen-stained eggs. So, he took one out of her basket. Just to hear her scream. But when she did, he was ready to break the egg on her head. Only, he could not. She was his full sister—who else did he have? So he put the egg back. Nonetheless, this act of absolution cost too much. And now here was Adi, beside him now, slunk up within reach, smelly little hyena. Right after coming back from his gallop with Ulan, he had seen Adi lying on the floor of their barn,

screeching away, one more temper tantrum. It was a sound to inflame one's ears.

Junior lifted him off the barn floor, then slammed him into a standing position. "Keep quiet," said Alois-Junior.

"Try and make me," said Adi.

Each time that Alois-Junior pushed on Adi even a little, the kid would go yowling to his mother. His kid brother had a mother—he didn't. He had to put up with him, therefore. It was a truce.

On this late afternoon, however, there was Angela offering baby talk to her chickens, and Adi up from the barn floor now and leering at him. So safe on his side of the truce. "Try and make me."

It was then that Junior took an egg out of Angela's basket, smashed it on Adi's head, and took his time rubbing in the yolk and fragments of shell.

Adolf yowled. It was as if he had anticipated just this species of showdown. Now, all on his own, he proceeded immediately to squeeze his gummed-up hair long enough to coat his palm with some of the spattered yolk. Then he wiped it on his shirt. Only it did not leave a large enough stain. So Adolf lifted another egg from Angela's basket—out came a yip

from her!—and broke that all over his own head, face, and shirt, in response to which he caterwauled as loudly as if Alois-Junior had kicked him in the shins. Then he ran from the barn to his mother. Vast screams, loud as catastrophe itself, could be heard from the kitchen.

Vast screams. Klara came running back, holding Adolf by the hand. Her tirade had begun before she reached them. She was trying to tell Alois-Junior about the letter, but it spewed forth in no consecutive order. His lies, she told him, were worse than the filth left by the pigs in their sty. "They have an excuse. They are pigs. You have nothing. You are a brute. You are a pig. You are nothing but filth." She could not believe her words. They were so strong. To her surprise, Alois-Junior actually began to sob. In all of this, he had not had until now any real idea of how ready he had been to love her, and how ready she was to dislike him right down to the depths. Yes, secretly, he had thought she really did like him, yes, more than she did his father. Now, he felt filthy. Felt filthy? To his ego, this was equal to a bereavement. He could not bear it. Just as suddenly, his sobs were choked. By his will. He stopped crying on the instant, nodded formally, and strode away. He did not know where the world would take

him, nor when, but he understood that he would not remain in Hafeld. He could not. Not for long. He must soon say goodbye to everyone and to everything here, especially to his horse. Or should he steal him?

This last idea proved too large for Alois-Junior. Yet it was enough to know that, for the sake of his future self-respect, he would not leave until he was ready to strike back. That must come one way or another. Soon.

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That night, they were quiet at dinner, even Paula whom Klara kept at her breast. Alois-Senior was certainly preoccupied. He had been stung by his bees a few more times than the one or two or, occasionally, three, he was used to receiving on most days—that was part of the occupational hazard, no more. Tonight, he not only had little to say, but hardly noticed that the others were silent.

He was waiting for bed. Lately, Klara had begun to remove his bee-stings and he was able to enjoy that. She was so adept. She never pulled crudely on the stingers. So he did not have to suffer the small fury of the wound through the night. Done poorly, it could feel like a needle had been

left inside. A tiny wound but a real one, ready to puff up. Sometimes, it even felt personal, as if, from meanness itself, it refused to stop hurting. But Klara knew how to nudge the flesh where the stinger was peeping out, and then coax it forth with a little soft pressure.

Now, when they went to bed, he was looking to have his pains cared for. Only, on this night, he had to wait. First, she must describe all the mess the boys had made, all that egg and shell. He did not care to listen. "Ach," he said, "it breeds bad feeling if you always take Adi's side."

"What are you saying? Tell me of something good we can expect from Junior."

"No," he said, "you must listen to me. We are obliged to look for a balance. We must try. A good balance between these boys, and it will all quiet down. That is the secret."

A silence. It was followed by a deeper silence.

"I will try," she said at last.

Her instinct was to reduce this space between them. If she didn't, the difference would increase. But could she believe that her husband was right? Young Alois was behaving like Fanni. Only ten times worse than

Fanni could ever have tried to be. Yet, was it possible? Had she left a curse?

Well, their dreams would be full of poor omens for more than a few nights. Alois-Junior kept giving a demonstration of his skills through these last days of June, doing just enough good work to justify his right to go off one more time with Ulan. The boy was good at his duties, he kept the hive boxes clean, he knew when and where to move the trays. He was even able to locate the Queen and put her into a Queen-cage without using the glass trap. Just like Der Alte, he could do it with his fingers.

He had also become the one to generate the prevailing mood at the table. The length of his silences weighed on them. No member of the family took a chance with him these days, not even Alois-Senior, but then he was entitled to worry. He understood one side of young Alois all too well. What love the boy felt for horses! Riding Ulan, the boy must feel as handsome as an officer squiring an elegant lady on one of the better streets of Vienna—how well the father understood such savory. But, Alois also knew what was hatching underneath. His son, Alois decided, might yet become a true lunatic. At present, the horse came first. Soon, it would be

all about girls. The father knew this as well as if sperm was stirring in his own good equipment. The power of those first revelations. Nothing could be better than the moment when a woman opened her legs before you. That first time! If you had an eye for the little differences, you knew twice as much about her as you learned from her face. Alois-Senior would attest to that. The female organ! Whoever designed this form had been so knowing about the job. (This was about as close as Alois ever came to the Creator!) Such a wonderful array of meats and juices—such a panoply of flesh in miniature—this offering of archways and caverns and lips. Alois was certainly no philosopher, so he would not have known how to speak of Becoming (that state of existence when Being feels itself out suddenly in the open), but all the same, he could have tipped Heidegger off. Becoming is, yes, exactly, when a woman opens her legs! He felt like a poet having such thoughts.

Let me leave it at this: if Alois could have talked to his son, he would have had a good deal to tell him. But he would never venture to speak of these matters. Having been a guardian of the border, which is to say a policeman, he could not even trust his children. A good policeman had to

live with trust as if he were handling radium. Trust was girded with risk. To offer your closest thoughts to others was to ask them to betray you, to ignore your counsel.

Still, if he could have spoken to young Alois, he would have been quick to inform him that there was nothing better than to be a young man interested in girls—he, the father, could tell him the best of stories if it came to that—"but, young Alois, I must impart this to you: Young women can be dangerous. Often, they are the sweetest angels, a few of them maybe, but it is not them you have to be ready to deal with. It is the fathers of these angels, or their brothers. It can even be an uncle. Once, I almost received a beating from a girl's uncle. I was big enough, but he was bigger. I had to talk my way out of it. So will you. It is certain that you will know how to talk, young Alois, but that is an ability which works better in a good-sized town. It works best of all in the city. Out here in Hafeld and Fischlham—not so good—country people can be difficult."

There was so much he would have told his son. If only they could have confided in one another! It made Alois sad. I must say, however, that it can certainly be construed as his fault. Nothing was more important than

the maintenance of his authority. Not even his love for his oldest son could come close to equaling that.

So he could not be so generous as to offer the core of his advice. But if he had been able to, he would have told Junior: "Enjoy every woman you can, but always be aware of the price. Especially here in the country. Listen, young Alois," he would have said, "country people do not have enough to do with their minds. Their backs are strong, but their lives remain unchanging. Year after year, it is the same. They are tired of being bored. So, they start to think about the wrongs that have been done to them. I say to you, son, watch out! Do not get a girl in trouble. When the time comes, do not be too certain that you will be able to deny that you are the fellow who made her pregnant. Sometimes, that does not work."

Alois lay in bed, drenched in perspiration. His son's drama unfolded before him with all the power of a fine tragedy. He would have said to young Alois, "Do not make fun of the father of any girl you have had in the straw. Never insult a peasant who has too little to think about. Ten years from now, he will find out where you are living, and he will come to your

door, and he will blow your head off with a shotgun. I have heard more than one story like that."

Since devils know to what extent men and women are able to conceal from themselves a clear view of their own motives, I soon understood that behind all this splendid advice to young Alois, the father was worried about his own safety, yes, Alois-Senior felt as if it could be his own treasured buttocks that were exposed!

One evening, over a month ago, while having his beer in the Fischlham tavern, there had been some talk which he dismissed at the time as idle, no more than a bit of prattle about a fellow who lived on the other side of the tavern a few miles further away from Hafeld. Two of the farmers who drank with him actually knew the man, and it seemed this fellow had spoken about Alois. Yes, more than once, they assured him, "He knows you, and he made it clear. He don't like you." They had laughed.

"I assure you," Alois said in all of his local majesty, "if I ever met this individual, I have forgotten it. His name means nothing to my mind."

Indeed, it did not, until the name came back to Alois during the middle of a sleepless June night. When he got up to look out their bedroom

window, he was offered a moonlit view of silver fields, and thought of how happy these fields must be to lie fallow and not have to satisfy young potatoes grubbing down for more of the earth's riches. Alois, however, then made the mistake of looking at the full moon, and abruptly, the face of this fellow who had declared his dislike of Alois Hitler came back to him.

Good Lord! As a memento of childhood, Alois invoked such a reflexive name only when there was bad news. Good Lord! That fellow was a smuggler, yes, he had caught him in Linz one day. Yes, he could certainly remember now. The fool had been trying to take some contraband over into Germany. Alois could not even recall what the illegal stuff had turned out to be, but he certainly remembered the hatred in the man's eyes. When they looked at each other, the expression of the other had been offensive enough to tempt Alois to strike him—what a vile look!—but such an act he considered entirely beneath himself. Certainly, he had not laid a fist on anyone while on Customs duty, not in years.

Was the full moon a mirror to one's memories? It was there before him now so clearly. He had not struck the fellow, no, but he had mocked him. "You are angry at me?" he had said. "Be angry at yourself. You are a

fool. Even my first day on duty when I was eighteen, I could have caught you. That is the kind of fool you are."

If he was going to recall it properly, could it be that the smuggler had not begun to look at him with such hatred until Alois began to tease him? Smugglers do not hate you for catching them—that is part of the game—but do not mock them. How often had he said as much to young officers. "Make a little fun of them, and they will never forgive you."

In the morning, after a night full of fear—yes, that smuggler had actually been sentenced to a year in jail, and now he was free—Alois arose from a bed bereft of decent rest with the recognition that there was not going to be a hell of a lot of sleep for him until he got a new dog, a truly fierce hound. Luther was good for nothing by now but yodeling at the moon on a night when nothing was happening. He needed a dog who would be ready for a bad fellow stealing across the fields toward the house with odium in his heart.

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It so happened that the right kind of dog was available. A farmer he knew was looking to sell a German Shepherd. "He is the best of his litter, which is why I have kept him all these months and have fed him, this gross guzzler. Can you afford to labor longer hours? Because he eats all the time. That is why I will sell him to you for next to nothing. Maybe he will make you as poor as he has made me. Then, I can laugh, and you will cry."

Good beer talk. But Alois, on taking a walk the morning after his colloquies with the full moon, decided to buy the hound.

He was a good one, Alois could tell. When it came to dogs, he had always had a nice understanding. He could stare right into the eye of a

fierce mongrel, yet because he felt a moment of love for the poor ugly old bastard, the animal would usually respond well. Alois could talk to dogs. If the beast growled a bit, Alois would say, "Oh, fellow, how can you speak so to me? I like you, I approach you as a friend." And he even knew enough to bring his hand to the dog's mouth as a token of friendship. He had never made a mistake. The one time in a hundred when a dog was actually fierce enough to bite, Alois could sense that, too, and he would extend the forefinger and pinky of the near hand, his separated fingers directed to the dog's eyes like pointed horns, and the animal might keep up his imprecations, but he would not attack.

So, Alois was delighted that this overgrown, six-month-old German Shepherd with the regal name of Friedrich. He looked fierce. Better still, he was a one-man dog. Let the children recognize that quickly. Let Klara complain. Let young Alois mind his business. He would be the only one to feed Friedrich. And he would change his name. From what he had heard, King Friedrich the Great had had a boyfriend, not a mistress. So, maybe he was not so great. To hell with honoring him. He would call the dog Spartaner. A warrior. Any ex-smuggler who had thoughts of coming to the

farm in the middle of the night, would not dare, not now, not with both dogs present. You could take care of Luther with a piece of meat and a cloth dipped in chloroform, but then Spartaner would be there to attack you.

How Alois enjoyed the walk back over the hills. He let the dog off the leash early, threw sticks for the animal to return, taught him to stop and sit at command, although he learned so fast he probably knew that much already. No question, however, this dog had good reflexes. Alois found himself in such a fine mood that he almost wrestled with the hound. Indeed, he restrained himself only because it was too soon. Wonderful. Quick love between a dog and a man is close to a perfect event, he decided.

The animal did not cease grinning with an all-knowing, all-breathing tongue that lolled at the edges of his grin until they came in view of the farm. But now, it was as if he realized, and all too abruptly, that there were problems awaiting him.

Of course. It was Luther. Alois was ready to clap himself on the head for having been in such a state of blind certainty that he had not thought once of how these two dogs might get along on first meeting.

They didn't. They were terrified. Each was abominably afraid of the other, and each was sick with shame at his own fear. They nipped with their teeth at the parts of their fur they could reach, clawed at newly discovered fleas beyond the reach of their bite, they barked at bees and then at butterflies, they ran in circles which did not overlap each other, they staked out territories.

Luther, while now an old dog, was larger than Spartaner, considerably so, but he was making the big mistake of lumbering around enough to tell the young dog what to capitalize upon.

As it transpired, they went to war two hours after this first sight of each other. The family rushed out in the yard to witness them rolling on the ground, their incisors as awesome as shark's teeth, blood on their faces and their flanks.

Alois, being the furthest away, was the last to arrive. He was also the first and only one to dive into the fray. He had no fear of either animal. He was too outraged. How did they dare to begin this? He had told Luther an hour before to shut up and sit down. This war was rank disobedience.

He roared at them to stop, and on the same impulse, flung them apart with his bare hands. The sound of his voice was enough. They lay on the ground, half stunned, breathless, two yards apart, showing open gashes on their noses and bloody fur at their throats. Spartaner kept panting as if the breath he needed was out there just beyond his tongue. Luther was ill within. The sum of his years had exploded. He looked at Alois with such pain, and so full an expression that Alois could all but read what he said: "I have worried about you and the safety of your house for all these years, and you yell at me as if I mean no more than that interloper you just brought in." Alois came near to petting him, and tenderly, but that would have spoiled his plans for turning Spartaner into a great dog, truth, Alois recognized that he would have to live with cruelty itself. Luther must go.

It was obvious that the younger dog had won. As their wounds healed, Luther did not try to eat until after Spartaner had gorged himself. This regime continued even when Klara made a point of putting out separate bowls at a distance from each other. But Spartaner proceeded to gobble up the second bowl as well. It hardly mattered. Luther had lost appetite.

Alois now decided what the next step must be. He would indeed have to dispose of Luther. Good old Luther was probably ready by now to lick the hand of the first thief who came strolling over in the middle of the night.

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This was the second time that Adi had heard his father roar, once at young Alois for leaving that hive in the sun, and now again to shock the dogs into separation.

What mastery had been in his father's voice! What a complete command of the situation! The fearlessness with which his father had leaped at two beasts entangled in one fury, blood flying from strings of saliva, yet his father had pulled them apart, thrown them apart. So fearlessly! Adi was in love with his father. For a few days that gave issue to a sense of inheritance, of a brave man's glory there for him to share. Whenever Adi had an opportunity now, he would go off into the woods by

himself—no small matter—but he forced himself to be as fearless as he could manage against the weight of all the silence and mystery of these immense trees quietly muttering above the greater silence of the forest. There, even if shivering in the warmth of the June air, Adi would work on the power of his voice. He would roar at the trees until his throat was too sore to open his mouth.

I was delighted with him. I was beginning to see why the Maestro might be exhibiting some special interest. If, after Adi's best attempts to bellow, a few leaves did shift by way of a passing zephyr, he was quick to decide that the power issuing from his throat had inspired this breeze on so still a day.

Once he almost met his father in the woods, but I steered him away. I did not want father and son to meet. Not on this occasion. The father might have mocked the boy for being so crazy as to shout at the trees, and the boy might have crept up behind his father and thereby would have witnessed the execution of Luther. I was looking to avoid that. The Maestro would be displeased if the shock proved excessive. (We looked to be the ones who would shape our clients, not events.)

That afternoon became a long walk for Alois-Senior and considerably longer for Luther. One of his hind legs had become infected after the battle. He limped and after a few hundred yards, he began to hobble.

I think Luther understood what was awaiting him. While the Maestro must certainly possess the ability to monitor any thoughts that pass between humans and animals, he does not encourage us to exercise our instincts in this direction. Or, at least, not among the devils I work with. For that matter, I often feel painfully curious concerning all I do not know about the departments, out-reaches, special services, zones, belts, salients, precincts, orbits, spheres, beats, and occult enclaves that the Maestro commands. Particularly this last—occult enclaves. For a devil, I know no more about the sinister than what I am instructed to use for effect in my work. The curses, spells, and incursions into madness which legend would have available to all devils, is, actually, meted out to us as tools and then only when needed.

So, it was not common for me to follow the thoughts offered and thoughts received which passed between Alois and Luther as directly as I could have done the same with two humans. All the same, I was at no loss

to recognize that Luther knew his end was near and Alois, willingly or not, was fully occupied in thinking of how he would dispose of the dog.

To begin with, he decided he would not shoot him. He did own a shotgun and a pistol. The first would be too messy, and the second made him uneasy. It would dishonor Luther. Yes. Pistols were reserved for malefactors. Whether in cold blood or self-defense, such a round from a pistol was not only impersonal, but a shattering end.

Let me remark that I was not surprised to read Alois' thoughts so easily. I was familiar with the workings of his mind in sleep and so could collect his conscious thoughts as adroitly as one connects the dots in a child's puzzle. He was not a client, yet I knew him better than many a client.

I think I may have been granted a few exceptional abilities for this particular service. If Adi was my major assignment, I had also been granted secondary powers on my return from Russia, enough, at least, to enter the father and mother with something like the clarity we possess for the mind of a client.

Alois' thoughts were, indeed, interesting on this occasion. He had decided that the only way to dispatch his old companion Luther was by the stroke of a knife directly into his heart. Poison would never do—worse than a pistol or a shotgun—wholly treacherous and it might involve hours of pain. Alois did not know (or care that much) whether men and women had souls, but he was in no doubt about dogs. They did. Treated properly, they were the epitome of loyalty. So, in turn, one had to be loyal to the soul of one's dog, yes. One would not blast him into the next place with the reverberations of the bullet—what a shock to the soul!—no, it would have to be the incisive stroke of a knife, fierce and clean as the heart itself in the moment its integrity is severed.

Alois kept thinking these thoughts as he trudged through the woods, slowed and slowed again by the hobbling of the old hound, and soon there came a point where Luther sat down and refused to move and looked for a long time into Alois' eyes. I could swear that if he had speech at his command, he would have said, "I know you are going to kill me and that explains why I have been afraid of you all my life. Now, I am still afraid, but I will not move further. Can't you see, I am losing the last of my dignity

as you insist on taking me further and further into the woods? I can no longer control my bowels and I do not want to keep pushing my legs along while they are covered with this filth, so here I sit, and you will have to lift and carry me if you wish to go further."

Alois blew his nose. He could see that the dog would not move. But they had not yet come to the ground he had selected for the deed. In his mind, he had chosen a small gully one-half mile further along where he could lay the carcass down in the bottom of the divide and cover him with mud and leaves, then branches, and finally, cover him over with the hollow trunk of a huge branch. If necessary, he would weigh it down with stones.

That had been Alois' plan. He had thought through every detail. He had liked the logic of such a burial—so much better than being choked by clods of earth, his dog was not a damned potato!—but now he saw that Luther would not move on. And he, Alois, regrettably, was no longer strong enough to carry him up and down along a rough trail for the next half mile. Therefore, it must be here. Afterward, he would go back to the farm, get a pick and a shovel and dig a grave in this copse, which was, in fact, a green

and decent place, enclosed by a half-circle of trees and some scrub brush, yes, it could be done here. Poor Luther.

So Alois laid the dog down, turned him on his back, looked into his face which had sickened in the last few minutes as directly and recognizably as the face of any old creature whose liver is rushing to the grave ahead of him, a sad old face to be certain, and Alois unbuckled the flap of the holster that held his hunting knife, laid the point of the blade at the center of the arch of Luther's rib-cage and pushed it in to the hilt. The dog's face contorted, the sound of his expiring came out of him and it was fearful to the ear. For it was much more human than Alois had expected. And then the dog's face passed through many expressions, changing from anger to gloom to bright life. His look settled finally into the face it would hold for the first few hours of its death before all began to decompose. Luther now looked like a young dog again, and some indefinable pride had returned as if he had always been more beautiful than anyone had realized, and could have become a great warrior if it had been asked of him when he was young, yes, he did look like a warrior as his features composed into this near-final expression.

It was a better death than he had hoped for, Alois decided. All the same, he felt hollow. He was pleased with his acumen, he had made the right choice, but he was shocked by the changes he had seen in the last moments of the dog.

Alois had almost ten years left to live, but on that afternoon in the forest he passed a junction on the road to death and so he wondered afterward and often whether he was a better man or a worse one because of this commitment to dispose of Luther in person, and, yes, honorable enough to bury him afterward.

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In the course of a walk that Luther and he had taken through the woods, the dog lay down to rest and died. Peacefully. That is what Alois told the family. Klara was the only one to suspect more than this might have happened. For, on the same night, perhaps six hours after the dog's demise, Alois made love to her with a good deal of vigor. It was more than she had enjoyed in a while.

He had had a variety of insect bites from his second trip to the woods, done to give Luther a burial with pick and shovel. So, it had taken a while to remove the stingers. By the time she completed her ministrations, they were both ready to make love. While she had no basis of comparison, she

was ready nonetheless to think that there might not be another man of Alois' age, only one year shy of sixty, who was so vigorous, this Uncle Alois, her man, a good man.

They had an agreeable few nights. Alois was experiencing what can only be called a transformation. He was loving her. That can occur in a marriage. Often, it is necessary precisely because most husbands and wives use the relationship for the major part of their time together to indulge in excrementitious exchanges. Indeed, that is why they married in the first place. As the Maestro portrays it, they had a need to be able to exercise petty cruelty at any moment to a dependable person close at hand. (This is because they were terrified of the rest of the world.) Lo! even the worst marriage allowed them one species of magic. All the endless upbraidings one would have liked to present to the world (but did not dare), could now be expressed through critical judgments on one's mate. All that spiritual excrement! In marriage, it is there to be traded back and forth, a zero-sum game, which, nonetheless, mediocre participants find much more enjoyable than hoarding it fecklessly inside.

Ergo, marriage is a workable institution—especially for dreadful people. Yet, it can also serve men and women who may be seen as average. Like our Klara and Alois. And strange shifts do occur. Few of these reversals are permanent, but while they last, aeration is offered to what has been an airless union.

So, we are always alert for signs of a fresh breath in the relations of married people. We can use these shifts to shore up the worst of marriages for a period—should that suit our purpose.

This was not the occasion here. The shift in attitude was of their choice, and it caught me by surprise. Intoxicated by the full moon and the June air that came up at night from the fields, lying beside her in a state of trust, was rare for Alois, but he knew that her fingers would make no painful mistake as she took care of removing each stinger—there were so many more of them these days given the lushness of early summer—a festival for the bees!—but she was deft, she was purposeful, and he was at peace lying beside her. For this little while, it was as if he had become something like a woman. I exaggerate. Of course, I exaggerate. I will even dismiss this assumption, no, it is not that Alois felt like a woman so much as that Klara

now came to seem the embodiment of what he had never been able to know—the presence of a mother hovering over him.

Night after night, their ritual took place. He even became so careless as to work on occasion without the veil. He was not seeking to be stung, he had, after all, acquired some skill and did make fewer mistakes. Still, there were additional stings, and they cannot be discounted. It is fair to say he was anticipating his reward. Each night her fingers played out their delicate movements on his brow, the cheeks of his face, and the meat of his hands.

Metamorphoses disrupt the arid habits of the mind. Sometimes Alois felt as if his brains were cracking and creaking. He was entertaining ideas he did not believe could belong to him. He actually began to consider whether the pain from these bites was a means of paying for his sins. Just supposing—for in no other way was he ready to assume that he believed in sinning—what if these little wounds were a way of accounting for bad things you had done? Could it be a system?

What a notion! It gave him discomfort. Up to the moment he had this thought, he had been enjoying some decent sleep. It came from the knowledge that full-chested Spartaner was out there below occupying a new

dog-house built for him on the day after Luther's death. That had been no small task, but necessary. Not only was a guard dog entitled to his own sense of shelter, especially in a new habitat, but Alois' handiwork had established close feelings between the hound and himself.

New ideas, however, are full of paradox. So, Alois twisted in the premise that guilt might be real. If nothing else, it gave too much dignity to guilty people! Awful persons. Weaklings who huddled in churches. They walked around with a stone in their stomachs and a bigger one up their ass. But now, he couldn't scorn them any more. He now had a recognition he had never allowed himself, and the remembrance constricted his chest. He had committed incest. If he had made love to all three of his step-sisters, that was not incest, no, not unless their father was his father. But had he not always known that Johann Nepomuk was his father even if he had managed to know it without knowing it? This was the sort of thought he had always chased to the rear of his mind.

In any case, the worst might be that he had made love to Johanna, the oldest of the three sisters. If Klara was not the daughter of Johann Poelzl, then she had to be his child ("Sie ist hier!") That was a fact as sharp as the

knife that had gone into Luther. What if there was a God who knew things like this?

In the dark, Alois began to nod his head. In common with all men who have strong minds (strong does not mean brilliant!) he had the mental force to push his worst thoughts back. He could even have relinquished the new pleasure of enjoying Klara as a mother. But not yet. He could not as yet relinquish the soulful pleasures that were present each night in the wake of the needles removed from his flesh.

On these June evenings, he allowed the echo of these pains to resonate within. He did not look to divert any of these modest agonies by searching for happy thoughts. Instead, he was there, ready to accept the message that came to him from this mysterious province of pain. To Alois, it was a species of music, replete with new sensations for the mind and heart, full of its own clarity even as it spoke to his flesh. He laid himself open to the soaring voice of each pain. Their sum was as rich in amplitude as a choral group in one's ear. He is exhibiting the saintliness of a sinner.

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Too little is understood about these matters. Saintliness is present in everyone. It can even be found in the worst of the worst. While I would not characterize Alois in this manner, he is looking, nonetheless, to pick up a morsel of beatitude at small cost to himself. He does not know that offering one's skin to the rhapsodies of small torture, is but one more means of avoiding fears of divine retribution. Since he has come much too near to acknowledging his acts of incest, this upsurge of saintly sentiments was soon replaced. More familiar activities moved in. By morning, he was back to thinking like a policeman. When an officer of the law detects a vice in himself, he knows enough to look for its presence elsewhere. Soon

enough, he began to worry about Alois-Junior and Angela. Was there something worthy of attention in that quarter? He did not like the tone of the conflict developing between the boy and the girl over who could or should ride Ulan.

To the father's surprise, young Alois was not looking to keep total possession of the horse. On the contrary, he was always offering to teach Angela how to ride. The father had to see this as a danger sign. At the tavern, Senior had already picked up a few rumors about a girl named Greta-Marie Schmidt—nothing to insult him or his son personally, but it seems Junior had been teaching Greta-Marie to ride bareback.

Now it was Angela's turn. She kept refusing. Junior kept teasing her.

"You are simply afraid to get on Ulan's back, " he would say.

"No, I am not."

"You are. Admit it."

"No. I swear I am not."

After several repetitions of such false testimony, she was driven to offer new remarks. "It is simple," she said, "I do not want to get up on Ulan.

What for? If I learn, and am good at it, what then? You will still keep the horse to yourself. I will have to beg for rides."

"I will let you get on him as often as you wish. All day, if it comes to it."

"No. You will try to drive me crazy. I know you."

"This is an excuse. What you fear is obvious. You are afraid of being thrown."

"I am not."

"Yes, that is it."

Finally, she said, "Have it your way. So, I am afraid. Why not? That horse is strong. And so high. He will throw me, and I will break my neck." She was ready to start crying out of annoyance itself. "You are so sure of yourself. You ride around wherever you want, but I know what will happen. I will get up on him and he will gallop. He will throw me off. I will die of a broken neck."

"Never. Your neck is just as stubborn as you are."

"Oh, yes, you are so funny. But I will die. What will you care? You have girls all over the place. I hear about them. You are always kissing

them, and then they kiss you back. But I am thirteen years old this week and I have never been kissed. So, I don't want to die before I even know what it is like." Now, she did burst into tears.

Alois-Senior heard the end of this conversation. As he approached the barn, he was in time to witness young Alois' reaction. The boy found her last speech so comic that he was unable to stop laughing. Finally he rolled on the floor of the barn.

At this moment, Alois told himself that maybe it was for the best if the boy spent so much time out there riding the hills, yes, better for all if he was carrying on with some farm-girl, rather than fooling about with Angela. That must not be! She was not even a half-sister. She was a full sister!

Now, Alois-Senior began to wonder if the two had ever been together. Was it not likely that they had just seen him approaching the barn? If so, this overheard conversation—was it all for him? Were they capable of such subterfuge? Why not? Their mother had been. Himself as well. Of course.

Over the next few days, Alois-Senior tried to observe Angela closely. But, he had spent too many years putting people ill-at-ease through the

intensity of his gaze. No surprise, then, if Angela was unsettled by her father's attention. She began to wonder if he was interested in her. At school, she had heard such stories. One girl had even been doing things with her father. Or so it was whispered. Ugh, disgusting, thought Angela, so very disgusting.

Now, whenever Alois-Senior was near, Angela would slide around him, drawing her hips in toward her belly as if to make certain nothing brushed.

This upset Alois. She was too artful at keeping her distance. He certainly did not approve of female sophistication in girls as young as Angela. The manner, indeed, by which she drew in her hips. Where had she learned to do that?

Klara now took a hand. If her distrust of Alois-Junior remained, she also knew that they could not send the boy back to the Poelzl farm. Therefore, they must do something with him here. She had learned one lesson from life, after all. It was that most situations were not comfortable. Often, a poor solution to a problem proved better than no solution. She had

learned from her father and mother. If the Poelzl children kept dying, her parents had managed at least to love the few who were left.

While she could not even bring herself to like Alois-Junior, and no solution was in sight, still she must decide upon one. Her husband was not going to plant potatoes again next summer. That was obvious. And putting in beets might prove just as unsuccessful. His bees, however, had been acceptable. Maybe more of good than bad. Perhaps they could do something in that direction.

Klara fixed on this. An imperfect solution—to repeat her wisdom—was better than no solution. Idleness was equal to the boy riding horses up and down the hills and getting into trouble.

So she suggested to Alois that perhaps they should build a bee-house like Der Alte had. Then, they could install ten or fifteen hives. A real business. That would keep them busy. And, she added, it would be good for Junior. Alois could make him a young partner. A small share of the profits could even go to him.

"Take him on as a partner? You don't even trust him. So you have told me again and again."

"I said all that, yes," she had to agree, "but I do understand your son."

"You do? I would say you make a lot of remarks. And they are contradictory."

"I understand him," she said. "He is ambitious. And he doesn't know what to do with himself. But, I can see. He wants to make money. I will admit—for now, he is a little wild."

"He will always be wild," said Alois.

"Maybe so," she admitted. "But boys change. If we do nothing. . ."

"I must think about this."

The notion did appeal to him. Hitler and Son, Apian Products. If that crybaby, Adolf, and the snot-nose Edmund ever developed, it could be Hitler and Sons.

That had to be down the road. But Klara was correct. They must do something. The boy's ambition had to be put into focus. At present, he looked upon work as virtually ignoble.

Alois went back to his books. Over a few afternoons, he studied the history, culture and ancient traditions of apiculture in the several tomes he had collected on the subject and soon decided that he would give a small

lecture to the family, designed for Junior, of course. Something like his old speeches in the taverns of Linz and Fischlham, yes, but now an exposition that might even be worthy of Der Alte.

He would tell Junior about the endless strife between bees and bears in the Middle Ages. That, decided Alois, could be a good story. Give the family a taste of such culture. He would even list all the lands where the bear and the bee struggled with one another. He actually memorized a few of the Latin terms. Selenarctos thibetanus for the Asiatic black bear. And Ursus arctos—the brown grizzly bear of Europe and America. Helaretos Malanus, the Malaysian sun bear. He decided to content himself with these three names. They would be enough. Too much memorization could wear you out. It was the stories he could tell. Why, even as recently as one hundred years ago, beekeepers would climb high trees to get to hives that the bears could not reach. "This was a common practice in northern Spain and in southern France," he would tell Junior. "One had to know one's trees then. Which were most congenial for good nesting. I can tell you. It was alder and ash, beech and birch, and most certainly, honorable elm trees, maples as well, oak, and willows. Lime trees," he could hear himself

declaring, "those have always been great favorites for bees and for us as well, even to this day. Such honey retains the finest aromatic traces of the skin of the lime. Yes," said Alois, addressing Alois-Junior in his thoughts, "this love of the bee for the lime-tree goes back to the very end of the Neolithic period, close to five thousand years ago. And the bees certainly knew how to build honey-combs in those days. North of here, up in Germany, they found one honey-comb recently, a fossil, that may have been bigger than any man who ever lived. Unbelievable. An eight-foot-long honey-comb. They found it, yes."

He was prepared to give whole funds of new information at the midday Sunday dinner. Get into the Greeks and the Romans. Since he rarely spoke at such times, as if to rebuke Klara for spending the morning in church, and the meal was generally consumed under the overarching profundity of his silences, he had a sense that a full exposition would impress Alois-Junior. If nothing else, he would witness the respect of the others. The number of countries involved would be enough to startle them. He would have stories to tell about the Bassari in Senegal, the famine in Kilingula, the Mbuti of the Ituri forest and the honey hunters in southern

Sudan. All that about Africa alone. He had stuffed such facts into his head like a bear gorging on honey.

He had read also enough to be able to quote a line from Homer, and then Israel right there in the Hebrew scriptures had told his sons to bring honey to Joseph in Egypt. To which Alois was prepared to add, "And this reminds me of the Egyptian god Min. As far back as 3000 B.C. he is referred to as 'master of the wild bees.' Then there is the great writer, Pliny, who speaks of the Sabaei to the south. Also Strabo. He quotes Erastosthenes on the abundance of honey in Arabia."

Since he had memorized all these names, he could have gone on. He was ready to tell them of crazy drinking bouts in Poland, the Ukraine, and in Russia from mead made of honey, the revels—although he must speak carefully of revels before his own family, yes, the wild habits of the Cossacks in the Urals or the Hungarians in the Carpathians.

Yet, when it came to deploying such erudition over the table, he decided to give it up. Perhaps he had crammed too much knowledge into himself. Klara kept nodding with approval, but whether it was for his words, or the apple strudel she had made, he could not really say, and

Angela kept nodding with an expression that spoke of school-house miseries. The three younger children were completely out of it, and Alois-Junior, who had shown a bit of interest, began to wilt. His eyelids closed for longer and longer periods.

Alois-Senior had to contain his temper. It had gone wrong. He simply did not have the eloquence of Der Alte. "You," he said at last to Alois-Junior, with an address as direct to the youth as a poke in the ribs, "You and me—let us go for a walk."

What a mistake to have given that lecture at a midday meal. It was obvious. When the boy was eating, he did not like to think. Could he be just like his father?

Alois did not take him far from the house, but sat him down on a bench near the hives and spoke instead about the money that was there to make by working together. "It is even possible that we could bring in Der Alte. He has made hints. He would be happy to work with us. That leads me to believe we would have much the better of the bargain. In a few years, you could be a prosperous young man, yes, most prosperous. And let me say to you, good-looking young fellows like you are able to marry to

advantage when it is seen that they are also able to make a fine living. We give it three years of hard work, and you will be sitting on top of a pretty good heap. Especially since you have a sharp sense of what is what. Believe me, you will be able to take your choice of some very good matches."

The afternoon sun was hot, and the boy was dispirited. Greta-Marie had been unavailable that morning—she, too, had been in church with her parents, and so he had visited Der Alte, and on this occasion, he may have been too greedy. Now, he felt stripped of vigor, and Der Alte's bad odor was in his nostrils. What a joy to work every day for three years with these two old men! Der Alte would be full of secret signals that his father might pick up, and it could be guaranteed that Alois-Senior would find something to yell about every day.

Now, all this sweet talk, so full of fraud. He had no desire to work for his father like a slave. Not for three years. Too many good things were waiting. The moment he was ready, he would leave them and go to Vienna. The more suddenly, the better. He had hardly forgiven Klara for being so rude last week. No, he would never forgive that.

"Good and honored father," he said, "I appreciate your concern for my future. I, too, think about it, and often. I have come to certain conclusions."

"Yes," said Alois, "that is the first step to making a life for yourself."

"So true. You speak with the knowledge of your gifts. I can say that I am full of respect for them."

He had now arrived at the obstacle that stood between them like a fence. Yesterday, for the first time, he had taken a jump with Ulan. It had been a low hedge, but not that low. It could have thrown them. But he had known. He had to take the jump. And he did. This was not the same, and yet in one way it was. He would have to do it again.

"Everything you say is so correct, Father, but. . ." He hesitated just long enough to repeat, "What you say is true for a person like yourself who is not exactly like myself. I have other gifts. So, I believe."

Alois nodded profoundly in order not to show his annoyance.

"Perhaps you will tell us what these gifts can be."

"I would say I have a gift for dealing with people." His father nodded again. "When I think of what I will do in years to come, it will be to make my living that way. By dealing with people."

At this point, he chose to stare into his father's eyes. It was no mean feat, but he held the glance.

"Do you wish to say that farming is without appeal to you?" said Alois-Senior.

"I must tell the truth. It is."

"But you wouldn't go so far as to say our little apiary has no appeal."

"I like the taste of honey. That is true. But I think I enjoy talking to people more than listening to our bees."

Now, Alois dipped into a reservoir of wisdom. "Son, I am prepared to let you in on a secret that will save you a few years. Maybe more. One cannot charm people for long. Not if you have nothing else to offer. People must respect you. If they do not, they will laugh with you, yes, they will sing with you, oh, yes, and then, poor boy, they will laugh behind your back. Hard work is the only basis of a good solid exchange between two

serious people. A man who tries to get by on good talk is nothing but a fiddler."

"I respect hard work," said Alois-Junior, "but not the kind that calls for being a farmer. I like riding over the land, but I do not like working on it. A young man who works on the land all his life is, in my opinion, an idiot. He is as dumb as the earth. That is not for me."

"I do not think you understood what I have said. It is not the earth I am asking us to use but the air. I am thinking of the little creatures who fly through the air. Plus Der Alte. Let me put him into our discussion. I see the most profitable use we can make of him."

"Father, in all respect, I cannot agree. You have said it yourself. He knows more on this subject than we do." The illumination that came from vaulting the hedge with Ulan was with him again. A direct sense of exultation. It was as if his blood not only insisted that he speak, but that he be ready to insult his father. That would be equal to taking your horse over a much bigger jump. "You must face it," he said, "we are not ready for Der Alte. He would steal us blind."

"What are you saying? Do you insult me as a beekeeper?"

"Well, you are always getting stung."

"That happens. In this work, it always happens."

"Yes, and for those who know how, they can say, 'Oh, I had a little accident today,' but for you, not so. Every day is an accident. You are full of bites. Always."

Now, Alois lost his temper, that valuable but dangerous temper he was always schooling himself to keep locked within. Now, there was no help. His temper was out of the gates.

"Boy," he said to his son, "you are not equipped to go out in the world. You have no schooling. You have no money. And you think you will be able to talk your way into money? That is nonsense. All you can know is to get your farmgirls to flap their tits at you and spread their legs. Why? Maybe they believe they will get lucky and pick up a husband as lazy as themselves. Maybe they will, and then I will have to look at grandchildren as ugly as your girlfriends, and you will have to work on her father's farm."

He had gone too far. He knew it. The fear he had been forming, that fear he had been storing in every center where fear is secreted in all the

crannies from the mind to the bowels, was as loose by now as his temper. It had been a large mistake to speak his mind.

Alois-Junior was even more vain, however, than his father. To speak of the children he might yet have as ugly—outrageous. "Yes," he said to his father, "I have worked with you. I have seen you as a farmer. Your knowledge is out-dated. Even Johann Poelzl, stupid as he is, knows how to farm. You don't."

"So, I am now stupid? Is that what you are saying? Maybe I am," he repeated. "Like father, like son. You flunked out of school. Then you lied about it. What a stupidity! I have lived with this foul and rotten news for too long. I can come to only one conclusion. The answer to why you lied to us and tried to write a counterfeit letter is that you are indeed an idiot."

"Yes," said Alois, Junior, "and you are different. You have beautiful children. Do you know why?" The boy's breath was coming so quickly that his voice went up in pitch. He was all but singing his way (high-pitch) through the next words, "Yes, you find your women, you fuck them, and then you forget them. And my mother dies. Maybe I am just like you."

The father's reflex was faster than his mind. His fist struck Junior on the side of the head hard enough to knock the boy down.

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If young Alois had been a client, I would have looked to convince him not to get up. His father would have been saddled with a guilt the boy could have ridden for a year. But since I had no control in this matter, Junior rushed at Senior, grabbed his legs, and, in turn, threw him to the ground. Turn for turn.

Knowing his life was at a crossroads, he made the error of helping his father to stand up. He had to. For he knew an incommensurable terror in the immediate moment after upending Alois-Senior. There was his father prostrate and looking like an old man. So Junior picked him up.

To be knocked down was bad enough, but to be assisted to his feet? By a youth with an open pimple on his face and the beginnings of a ridiculous little brown mustache which had sprouted but a few lank hairs? The mustache was an insult all by itself. He now struck Junior again and the success of the blow illumined him. He began to beat upon Junior until the boy fell to his knees, whereupon Alois kept pummeling him further even as his son lay on the ground.

Klara had come out of the house by now. She begged Alois to stop. She wailed. And that was just as well. For now, Junior did not move. He lay motionless on the ground and Klara kept screaming.

She believed she was shrilling for the dead. "Oh, God," she managed to cry out, "I cannot believe what You have allowed."

I saw a rare opening. She was without her Guardian Angel—not a Cudgel near. Angels flee from people who scream so loudly—they know at such moments how close the man or woman is to us, and they feel outnumbered. For devils rush in to attend such outcries. To add to the tumult, there was Adi giving vent to the most penetrating set of shrieks.

And Klara was vulnerable. I saw my moment. I reached her heart, I touched her thoughts. She believed Alois-Junior was dead, and his father would spend the rest of his days in an awful jail. It was her fault, all her fault. She had told the father to get close to the boy even when she knew better. Since the sum of her experience had told her that the majority of one's prayers to God were not answered, she prayed now directly to us, she called upon the devil, she implored him. (Only the pious can believe the devil has such powers!) "Save the boy's life," she implored, "and I will be in your debt."

So we had her for the future. Not as a client. Merely attached to a bit of her soul. These changes are never whole and immediate. But now, we had entrance. We could yet play a few tunes on her mind.

She was a true gain. When Alois-Junior began to stir, she was convinced that she had received a direct response. She felt the full responsibility of an oath. Unlike so many with whom we traffic, she was the essence of responsibility. She would never betray an oath. In consequence, she felt damned on the spot. And she was full of grief at the pains she must be rousing now in God. What a nun she would have made!

Our most significant gain was with Adi. He had seen his father beat young Alois into the ground. He had then heard his father utter a groan remarkable for the fullness of its woe. Then as Junior began to stir, Adi saw his father stagger off into the woods. Alois-Senior was fleeing to a glade in the woods where he could retire in full horror at how it had turned out, and was at once given a whole taste of Klara's apple strudel as it extruded through his nostrils. In consequence, unable to breathe, he felt as if he must evacuate a cannon ball from his esophagus. For the rest of the midday dinner was surging up and down in his gullet with almost as much force as the blows he had struck.

That was enough time to spend on Alois-Senior. My attention was for Adi. The boy had voided everything, urine, feces, food. He was half out of his senses with fear that his father would return and beat his head into the ground.

That was an opportunity for my skills! I began to engrave the plenitude of this beating into Adi's memory. Again and again, I returned the same images to his mind, until—given his certainty that it would all be done to him as well just so soon as his father would return, I managed to brand

his mind with one thought. It was a clear image of himself lying close to death from the beating his father had given him. He not only ached in his limbs, and his head hurt, but he now had a clear impression that he had had to get up from the very ground where he had been beaten down.

In later years, at the height of his power, Adolf Hitler would actually believe that he was the one who received the beating. On many a night during the Second World War, he would tell the tale to his secretaries and to his military adjutants as they sat at table after evening mess. He would be eloquent. "Of course, I deserved a whipping," he would say. "I gave real trouble to my father. My mother, I recall, was distraught. She loved me so, my dear mother." He would remember himself as being just as brave as Alois-Junior, yes, he had stood up to his father. "I think that is why he had to beat me. I must have deserved it. I said terrible things to him, words so awful I cannot repeat them. Probably, I deserved this good beating. My father was a fine strong decent man, one Austrian who was a real German. Still, I do not know that a father should ever beat a son so close to death."

Yes, he could tell stories about his childhood to bring tears to the eyes, and pure sorrow to the hearts of all who listened. It had not come all

at once, this immaculate bedrock lie I had fixed into those creases of the brain where memory was stored. My art was to replace a true memory a false one (and that can be equal in its exactitudes, even among the most malleable clients, to removing an old tattoo and substituting a new one.)

Given my developed instincts, I had known that this fiction had to be perfect. Only then could I use the implant to develop a future incapacity to tell the truth. By maturity, he was in command of an elaborate artwork of lies to support even his smallest response. He could shade the truth by a hair or, equally, subvert it altogether.

Worked properly on a client, it is, as I say, a slow process, and it took many a year to convert that initial scoring of his psyche over to a full installation. The grown man would have been ready to die in the belief that he was telling the truth when he declared that his father had almost pounded him to death. From time to time, I still took pains to reinforce the keel of this one absolute lie. It was worth it. For the Maestro often pointed to my work on this matter: "There is no better way to usurp the services of a high political leader," he would tell us, "than most exactly by this direct method.

Such figures are of considerably more use to us when they do not know that they are lying."

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Later, by nightfall, several events of exceptional nature were initiated by Alois-Junior once he realized that his father had headed off to Fischlham.

This was not customary. The tavern served no drinks on Sunday and Senior knew that—who didn't?—but he had also heard of a house on the outskirts of town where a former poacher who had once been an unsuccessful farmer now collected a few kronen by way of the few men who would visit his house after church or on the Sabbath evening for a stein of beer in the pantry.

Alois had never visited before. It had been altogether beneath every notion he looked to keep of what a reputable retired official of the Crown

might consider reasonable activity, but this was one of the few times in his life when he had to have a drink at all costs. So, his knee throbbing from the first fall, his head aching from the discharge of his rage, and his heart sore, he hobbled across the fields into the sunset and took in enough, perhaps even a gallon of beer, to drown not only his sorrows but the augmented miseries of his body.

Nobody had to help him home. There were offers, but he rejected them—it was still early enough in the evening for the sky to retain some light and on the full fury of his sense of dignity, he made it up over the first hill out of Fischlham, and almost up the second before he lay down in a pasture to sleep. He awoke a couple of hours later with his head not six inches away from a near-to-monumental cow ball the size of a derby hat.

His hair was clean. He had not rolled into it. If he had believed in Providence, he would have offered thanks, but it was just as well he did not, for by this time—it was after ten P.M.—decently rested by his impromptu slumber, he came up over the last hill, and saw the embers of a fire not thirty feet from his front door.

There had been no wind that night, which was just as well for the house, but there were also no more than ash remaining of his three Langstroth boxes, nor any sign of bees except for those poor tens of thousands who had been roasted to a microscopic crisp, as well as a startling sense of gloom clinging to the walls of his home. He felt terror.

Klara met him. If she had been weeping, she was, by now, dry-eyed, and as crisp as the husk and butts of the fiery remains of the hive colonies, and as harsh in manner as the odor that rose from the last black lees of the honey which had smoked through the conflagration.

Alois now knew a small but finite part of his wife's heart, her good will, and her allegiance would be soured forever by the fact that on this, the worst of all nights, he had found a way to drink so much beer that he reeked of it from six feet away.

Detail by detail, she told him what had happened. It was even worse than the sight before him. The boy had ridden off on the horse—of course—and then he had come back when they were all asleep, or pretending to be—she would admit that they were by now afraid of him—

and he had gathered together his clothing, tied it in a sack, attached it to the saddle of the horse and had gone off again, allowing them to breathe.

Yet, just half an hour ago, safe as they hoped themselves to be now in the beginning of sleep, the hound dog began to bay, and howled with such ferocity that she almost left her bed to investigate. But then he yelped once and made noise no more, he just whined a little—like a puppy. And the horse neighed. Young Alois was back.

So, then the flames had begun. She had known almost at once what was happening. Adi, as alive as a deer in flight, kept running between the house and the beehives. "He has set them all on fire. With kerosene," cried Adi. "I know. It is like it was before." And he was laughing as much as he was weeping, not certain whether this was a terrible event or another glorious act of incineration.

She had not been able, Klara informed him, to put out the blaze. She and Angela had done what they could, which was to throw pails of water on the walls of the house closest to the flames. More than that would have required the presence of a man.

And Alois-Junior, where was he? Oh, he had departed once more on Ulan. They had heard the last sounds of the animal's hooves as he trotted away. Nor would he be back. She did not think so. Had he left a way for himself to return?

Worst of all—Spartaner had been poisoned. In all the hubbub, they did not look at him too closely that night, but by morning he was obviously ill, and then, to make matters worse, he did not even die until the end of the week.

BOOK ~~X~~

TO HONOR AND TO FEAR

-1-

A letter came in August from Alois-Junior. After that, they did not hear from him again. Alois-Senior did learn in the course of a trip to Linz that the boy had sold Ulan to a horse-trader for half of the steed's value, and that would have been enough for young Alois to live in Vienna through the time it might take to find work.

On many a late afternoon, Alois-Senior would walk down the trail that must have been used by Junior on that night when he set out for the road to Linz. Senior would come to an old stump, now his favorite seat in the forest, and there he would listen to the birds.

At rest on these amputated remains of what once had been a noble oak, he would mourn the bees he had lost, even as he proceeded to enjoy a fanciful scenario. He would dream that he had come back early enough on Sunday night to chase the horse and boy through the woods. In his mind, he had kept running after them, until brought to a halt by his heart and the pangs in his lungs.

That fantasy became essential to a long summer of mourning for all he could name as lost, and then he would grieve even more for what he could not name.

So the summer passed. He hired a man to assist him in mowing their pastures. He baled his cuttings, and sold the hay in Fischlham. Since there were no hives now, he had no worries concerning them, but he did feel a hollow in his body, a sense of absence. No fear now of swarming, no calculations to be made of how much feed to give in the after-season to the colonies, no further examinations of the health of the hives, no further estimates as to how many old bees had died but were not yet replaced by new-born, no tremors at the thought of mouse invasions, no need to consider whether he should put up netting to keep birds away, nor any need

to weigh the boxes, no more ponderings on whether enough pollen had been collected by the foragers to provide them with sufficient protein through the winter, and no Queen to locate. There were not even any Langstroths to repaint. No records to be brought up to date. He was done.

Sitting by the stump, there came an afternoon by the end of summer when the more caustic tastes of mourning finally travelled down some vent of the mind where useless feelings are drained. He actually said to himself, "I am relieved that I do not have to worry about my bees any more. I loved them, but their loss is not my fault."

At this juncture, I did not have to pay daily attention to the Hitler family. They would be in Hafeld until they left. I hardly was concerned. One of my developed instincts is to know when the humans under my study are ready to change at a good rate, as opposed to when they are all-but-inert.

In truth, that is how we measure Time. Except for those occasions when the Maestro assigns us to intense activities, to dramatic arenas where history can be shaped, as was true at the Coronation of Nicholas II, we live reflexively. We, too, can be in need of fallow periods. So, a quiet summer

for the Hitler family went by for me like a passage of sleep. I tended a little to my other clients.

Alois, meanwhile, was marooned in the pall of a long and lackluster meditation.

He was worrying to a modest degree (modest for Alois!) about the value of the farm. If he were to sell it, could the price match what he had paid? Or would a potential buyer recognize the beginnings of neglect? That became the focus of his attention. Nothing, he decided, is more subtle than the onset of neglect. While he did feel more relaxed than in many a year, it did nag at him that he was leaving all too many chores to the women—certainly those which did not call for a man's strength. He did nothing with the vegetable garden. He thought of buying a new dog; instead, he examined the paint on poor dead Spartaner's dog house. Was it was about ready to peel in the summer heat?

They did not seem to need a new dog. With young Alois gone, he did not have to entertain any fears of an irate father skulking in the neighborhood. No parent of Greta-Marie Schmidt was likely to appear on the doorstep—he could give thanks that that particular young lady was not

pregnant, for if she were, he would by now have known all about it. And the smuggler who lived on the other side of Fischlham hardly entered his thoughts. Somehow, given the absence of Alois-Junior, he, too, seemed far away.

Senior's real worry was that he might become habituated to idleness. Even a few minutes spent in doing nothing at all, had once been guaranteed to excite his annoyance. Now, he felt himself becoming a little too contented by a curl of cigar-smoke, or the drift of a cloud.

Such peace could prove expensive. A farm that was remained unworked—no matter how tidy one kept the house and the yard—might never look right. Not to a potential buyer. Sharp eyes might detect a subtle reproach in the fields. A small part of Alois continued to run uphill in his sleep.

The economic facts (which he calculated over and over on separate pieces of paper using separate stubs of pencil) was that no matter how observant he and Klara might be with expenses—and they were!—sooner or later, they would be obliged to spend more each quarter than his pension.

So, there might come a time when he would have to decide that it cost too much to go to his miserable tavern in Fischlham. That would double every indignity. How much he was missing Linz! There, at least, you could find a drinking-place with intelligent people. What it all came down to was that they must sell the farm.

That would not happen quickly. These days, the less work one did, the more time it took for anything to get done. Moreover, very much against his will, he was beginning to feel remorse about Alois-Junior. What an insidious ungovernable emotion! Was it incumbent upon him as a father to forgive his son? Yet what if Alois-Junior was also full of remorse? He could not bear the thought of that boy alone in a poor room. Would he be sitting on a mean cot, his eyes full of tears?

Like an amputated forearm whose nerve-endings are still alive at one's elbow, Alois-Senior began to think again of Hitler and Sons, Apian Products. Because he could invest no essential belief in the notion, the thought, perversely, was sweeter than before. It might be unrealistic, but it did feel pure.

He even brought it up with Klara. If she had felt at a good and considerable distance from her husband all summer, if she could not forgive him for being such a helpless drunk on that terrible night when he came home too late to prevent the destruction of the hives, nonetheless, her sense of duty still prevailed. "If you want him back, if you truly want him back, I will not stand in the way." That is what she said. That was what she felt obliged to tell him. She even felt a sense of shame, for her quick hope was that they would not find him.

No such drama was going to develop, however. A letter without a return address came a few days later from Vienna, a vile letter. "You killed my mother." The phrase was repeated several times. Then, the letter declared that the son would yet be famous, and the father would twist in his grave.

Alois could not believe what he read. The rest was worse. "You were a terrible farmer, and the reason is clear. You are, as I happen to know, half-Jewish. No wonder you cannot be a farmer." And there were so many misspellings in the letter that out of a sense of shame for his son, Alois-Senior had to write it out all over again before he felt able to show it

to Klara. As he wrote, his hand shook so badly that the arthritis which would later bind the movements of his fingers gave an early warning on this day. The original, however, with its ink blots and errors of syntax, was too abominable to keep. The boy had always been able to speak so well. How could he have no embarrassment about these crudities?

All the same, those awful words had to be shown to Klara. Alois-Junior could only have received such rank ideas by listening to Johann Poelzl. That pious hypocrite! How the old buzzard must have gossiped to the boy!

Klara, however, kept the discussion well away from the person of her legal father, Johann Poelzl. She only said, "I did not mind that thought so much. I used to think this was your reason for not going to church."

He was indignant. "It did not bother you to believe you had a husband who was half-Jewish?"

"How could it? Alois, you have always said that a man who hates Jews is uncultured. So, I knew. It is not appropriate to hate Jews. It is a sign of ignorance."

"But that does not make me Jewish."

He had a headache, sudden and fierce. Old memories of the earliest taunts at school now came back. When he was six years old. Of course. That had been the talk in Strones and in Spital.

"It never bothered you to think I was half-Jewish?" he said again.

"No. I was always so worried about our children. I wanted them to be able to live." She could not keep her eyes from watering—not with these recollections at the root of her tear-ducts! "So I was glad to think you were part Jewish. I thought maybe that could give a little fresh blood for our Adolf and our Edmund and Paula."

"But I am not at all Jewish," he said. "We must be clear about this. Old Johann Nepomuk once told me who I am. I am his son. I am your real uncle, yes."

"He told you? He said such words?" She knew her grandfather Johann Nepomuk well enough to understand that he could never utter such a speech. Not in that way—not so directly.

"He," said Alois, "suggested this information to me. He did state that he knew who my father was. And then he said, 'This man was not Jewish.' He did not have to say more. It was clear. There was only one way he

could know. So, that was that. The next time a boy called me a Jew, I gave him a good poke in the face and broke his nose. That was one fellow who was left with an ugly mug." Alois began to laugh at the recollection. Then he laughed even more as if to signify that he was not heartsick. "And all these years you thought the opposite?"

She nodded. She hardly knew whether to be relieved or disappointed. She had always felt a sneaky excitement being wed to a man with such blood. Jews did forbidden things in bed. That she had heard! Maybe Alois and she had even done these same forbidden things. And Jews were reputed to be intelligent. That also she had heard. Now, if Alois was not half-Jewish, she was truly confused.

Alois, thinking of Johann Poelzl, could have boiled the old bird for soup.

-2-

The reader may recall that when I presented myself as the narrator of this novel, I did appear as an SS man. Indeed, I was. Over that period in the late Thirties, I was invested corporeally in a particular SS officer. I lived and functioned at the time within a person named Dieter. At a price. We do not engage in total investiture unless high stakes require it. For the cost is direct. One must relinquish the stimulation of living in more than one consciousness at once. Of necessity, demonic power is then diminished. One becomes a simulacrum of a human.

So, as Dieter, I did make the inquiries in Graz described earlier. I only learned, however, that the true father of Alois was Johann Nepomuk by information I received by way of the Maestro.

At the time in 1938, I was not able, obviously, to name my source. In the SS IV-2a, we were obliged, like any other intelligence organization, to be credible, at least, among ourselves, and there was no way to explain to Himmler what the real origin of my information had been.

Moreover, these exceptional sources allow us to inhabit simultaneously two eras in Time. In consequence, many complications beset us. If, living as Dieter, I had been privy from the start to the actual carnal events in Strones in 1837, then the letter sent by the son of Alois-Junior to Adolf Hitler would have presented no problem. I would have known that Hitler was not Jewish. Still, I would have been at an impasse trying to convince Heinrich Himmler of such a fact. To make it credible, I needed to use a means of information-gathering with which he was familiar.

I believe the Maestro came to a conclusion long ago that he must quarantine the memories of his devils if he wished to keep order in his share of the world. So, as just indicated, we do not live often employ our

potentiality to live in two periods at once. Nonetheless, our instincts reach beyond human intuitions. I would warrant that the memories we are not encouraged to recall are there nonetheless to serve as guides to instinct.

I mention this condign matter because the question whether Jewish blood is present in the family has reared up so suddenly for Alois and Klara.

He was in a fury. His rage at Johann Poelzl would soon subside into what would be no less than a lifelong grudge—his heart would lift on the day that Poelzl died—but his fury against Alois-Junior was up again.

Senior was in the moil of such an inner storm that he could not stay in bed with Klara. For the first time in all the years that they had lain side by side in the dark, he had to get up on this night, dress, pace the floor, try to sleep on the couch, try to sleep on the floor, and succeeded, of course, in keeping both of them awake.

Klara knew she would have to pay directly. "Don't say a word," she told herself, "do not touch this subject ever again."

While I cannot speak with the medical authority of those devils who were assigned by the Maestro to enter medical school and internship (in total investiture), I will say it is possible that the cancer which would end

Klara's life in 1908 could have taken a determining step forward on this miserable night.

Too much had happened to her at once. She had lost possession of a long-cherished idea. Because of the certainty that her children with Alois were one-quarter Jewish, she believed that her last three born were provided with more opportunity to stay alive. If she had one notion about Jews, (and she could not really say she had ever met one other than Alois) it was that no matter what their faults might be, and she had heard the most awful stories from friends, relatives, storekeepers, the truth was also obvious—these Jews knew how to survive. To be so disliked, yet still be among the living! (Some were even rich people!) Klara had always been impressed, therefore (in absolute privacy with herself—whom could she talk to about this?) that she was with a half-Jewish man and they did have three living children, saved in good part by their Jewish blood.

She was not one to allow herself to be bothered by niceties of logic. If Gustav, and Ida, and Otto had all died much too soon, she could attribute that to her side of the family. But Adolf had survived, and then Edmund and Paula (over whose health she prayed every night.)

Now, her confidence was breached. If the three remaining children continued to live, it would not be because of some historic preservative in their veins. They would have no such advantage.

A large reason not to sleep. What was worse, she was ashamed of her cowardice. How could she have accepted the idea that Alois-Junior should be invited back? Lying there, listening to Alois-Senior going back and forth, thumping the floor with his body as he lay down, then slamming the floor again with his fists, she was soon suffering her own rage. It was shocking. She could not believe what she was telling herself. If it were possible, yes, she could kill Alois-Junior. Only, she knew she could not. She would not ever. But the effort to repel such a fury in herself throbbed in her heart—which is to say, in her breast—with such force and such detestation that, yes, it is possible—this could have been the night when the breast cancer which would yet burn with hell's pains in her chest, might have begun. If it were crucial to know, I would have consulted one or another passing demon of a doctor I knew, but, to repeat, we do not request such disbursements to satisfy a whim.

I prefer to take us back to Alois.

The immensity of his rage on this night was that he had betrayed himself. And in the worst manner. The joy of rage (which is too infrequently considered) is that it can offer the same nourishing sense of self-righteousness that is available on regular occasions to the more hypocritical of church-goers. The core of such pleasure is never to be angry at oneself, only at others. Yet, here, on this night, Alois could not escape himself—he was infuriated at the cost of his own deeds.

If Junior had turned out badly, it was his fault, his fault alone. By such a light, he was among the worst of human beings, a father who was weak. How despicable! He had spent his life obeying orders, and then enforcing them in the Customs Service, he had revered Franz-Josef, a gallant, great, and good king who embodied hard work and discipline. His guardianship of his own nature had become a species of homage to Franz-Josef. If he had ever had the good fortune to be on duty during some near-miraculous occasion when the Emperor might visit, how he would hope that the good king would recognize what a fine influence his majesty had had at least on one Customs Officer.

But he had imparted none of that sense of respect to Alois-Junior. Was it because he had felt too guilty about the boy's mother? Yes, he had treated Fanni badly, so badly that he could not be stern with the offspring. There had been a lack of discipline in himself which could only be described as unforgivable.

It took every hour through the darkness of this night for his rage to cool. It was not until the first light of morning—a dim light that came with shrouds of rain at dawn—that he was able to speak from one part of his mind to the other, and so could issue a few orders on what his future conduct with Adi must become. He was not going to make the same mistake he had allowed with Junior.

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Now, whenever he wished to bring Adi to his side, Alois would whistle. It was a fine drill of a whistle, sharp enough to hurt the ear. Nor did he reduce the intensity when the boy was within arm's reach. In the tavern, Alois was now fond of saying, "If you are raising a son, do not let go of the whip. I speak from experience."

More than once, Alois said to Adi, "Time and sacrifice were wasted on your older brother. You, Adolf, will not waste my time."

Adi became paralyzed with fear. I had to wonder how the final effects of this could serve our purposes. We certainly know how to use humiliation and self-abasement as a tool when working with manic-

depressives. If we look to drive a client into a violent act, a series of humiliations can stir the subject into oscillating faster between the poles of his depression and his mania. Soon enough, there is an eruption.

I did not see, however, why we needed anything drastic at so early a time in Adi's life. The Maestro was certainly not urging me to restrain Alois. The father was flooding the boy's spirit with wretchedness. While it would not be all-consuming and oblitative, it did amount to a taste of pure misery. Adi was being given a purview of the anguish that attaches itself to ineradicable melancholia.

These are established means for seeding suicide. So, I could not know what ultimate purpose the Maestro had in mind. The boy was delicate enough for it to go wrong. What a disaster, and for so little.

Yet, the Maestro often surprised us by such moves. He was a bold gambler, and often ready to take extreme chances with the lives of our clients. There were occasions when the Maestro, entertaining an ambitious future for a young client, would be ready to incite such torture. (Provided he was dealing with a proud spirit.) I think he saw it as a species of inoculation.

Naturally, these gambles make for unstable results. For once we implant a deep sense of humiliation in a proud client, we have the task of converting such a wound into a strength. That can prove more difficult than transmogrifying a coward into a hero. Yet, when we succeed, when the psychic abyss of a would-be suicide is transmuted into promontories of achievement, an immense gamble has succeeded. The once-humiliated wretch has now acquired the power to humiliate others. That is a demonic power, and does not come easily. I went through many years, indeed, when I was ready to give up on this project. After the death of Edmund in 1900, of Alois-Senior in 1903, and of Klara in 1908, Adi was jobless in Vienna, and stricken with timidity. He had quit school too early, was an avaricious reader who remained hopelessly superior to what he read (particularly when he could not understand it) and, in addition, was lazy, prone to temper tantrums, and possessed of an ego as swollen as a gangrenous limb. All the same, he was desperately afraid of virtually all meetings with human beings, and had no love-life with women whatsoever. Yes, this boy was an unmitigated mess.

I was depressed. This project to which I had been attending since his birth, now nineteen years old, remained an outrageous gamble. Unless some historic changes could accelerate, even thrust, my protégé into prominence, he would end up as one more failure. (Through his adolescence, he had prepared himself for nothing other than for future fame and there seemed no sign of anything remotely like that. The upheavals in Germany and Austria after the First World War were still more than a decade away.) My role, as I saw it in 1908, was to continue to be a jockey who guided a horse running against unbelievably long odds. I could foresee further demotions for myself.

All this is not of much interest now. We know, after all, what happened to the horse. And I was the one who rode him (with occasional but crucial help from the Maestro) all the way up to glory (and down again, which is one good reason why I have proceeded to tell this much of the tale.)

And yet, we can all certify—who indeed cannot?—that he did learn, and far better than his father—how to humiliate others. How curious that he used to be paralyzed by his father's whistle.

Nonetheless, the beginnings of a revolt were even then in progress.

Adi was not reduced altogether. Having already come to believe that he was the one who had been beaten into insensibility, he was always ready to test Klara's attitude toward him.

"Mother," he told her, "my father now looks at me as if I am always guilty."

She was certainly aware of this. The whistle had become a needle in her own ears.

"Adi, you must never say that your father is wrong," she told him.

"But what if he might be?"

"He does not wish to be wrong. Perhaps he makes a mistake."

"What if he is very wrong?"

"It will not remain that way." She nodded. She did not know if she believed what she said next, but she said it nonetheless. "He is a good father. A good father always realizes sooner or later that he may have been going for a little while in the wrong direction." She nodded again as if to oblige herself to believe such words. "There can be a moment," she said, "when the father recognizes that he, too, can be wrong." She put her hand

to the boy's face as if to cool the fever in his cheeks. "Yes," she said, "he hears his own words and realizes that they are not correct. So, he changes."

"He does?"

"Absolutely. The father changes." She spoke as if this had happened in the past. "He changes," she repeated for the third time, "and now there is order in what he says. Now, it goes in a good direction. Because he is ready to change. Do you know why?"

"No."

"Because you were able to tell yourself that you would never cause him confusion. You would not do that because he is your father." She held Adi by the waist and looked into his eyes.

Klara had been the first in the family to recognize (and she was still the only one) that Adi could be spoken to as if he were ten or twelve years old. "Yes," she now said, "it is best when there is no confusion in the house. So, you must never accuse your father. That might cause him to feel weiblich. And for him to feel weak is very bad. You cannot expect him to admit that he has a weakness."

At this point, she began to speak of ehre-fucht. To honor and to fear. She explained the importance of these words. They had been imparted to her by her mother. Johanna used them when speaking of Johann Poelzl. He was, her mother all but said to Klara, a hard-working but very unlucky farmer—who in the family did not know that?—and yet her mother had always treated Poelzl with ehre-fucht as if he were an important and successful man. "That is what my mother taught me, and I now tell it to you. The word of the father is the law of the family."

Klara said this with such solemnity that the boy felt it come into him like holy strength. Yes, some day he would have a family and all who were in it would honor him and they would fear him. At this point, his need to urinate (which always afflicted him in these years whenever he was on the point of developing magnificent thoughts about himself) spoke to his crotch. So, in the midst of his mother's peroration, he almost had an accident, but did not—not if he was to be entitled in the future to these emoluments of honor.

"Yes," she said to her son, "the word of the father has to be law. Right or wrong, one must never argue with his word. You must obey him."

For the good of the family. Right or wrong. the father is always right. He must be. Otherwise, all is confusion."

Now, she referred to Alois-Junior. "He did not have ehre-fucht," she said. "Promise me that will never be said of you. Because, now, you are the oldest brother. You are important. That boy who used to be your brother is as good as dead."

Adi was wet. His entire body was wet. His perspiration might as well have been illumined by sacred light. Just so complete was the importance of this sentiment. I entered his thoughts long enough to tell him, "Your mother is correct. You are now the oldest brother. The younger ones will now honor and respect you."

Yes, Adi understood, and I worked upon his mind each night, until this concept became a mental certainty equal to one of those well-paved avenues of the mind that are always ready for full mental traffic. On many a night I told him again that Alois-Junior was totally separated from the family. Alive or dead, it would not matter.

Alois-Senior was of no small aid to me. By December, he wrote a new will. It stipulated that in the event of the father's death, the son named

Alois was to receive no more of the estate than the minimum prescribed by law. "The smaller the better," he added. Since the act of drawing up a will re-engaged all of Senior's long-developed sense of proper official procedure, he also added: "This is stated in the full recognition of the seriousness of such an act by a father. In my years as a Chief Customs Officer for the Crown, I warrant that I became most familiar with the responsibility that must always be seriously attached to such grave decisions."

Whereupon, having completed the re-writing of his will, he whistled for Adi and read portions aloud to him.

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Alois' decision to write a new will came after he knew that he would be able to sell the farm. The buyer had been referred to him by Albrecht Rostenmeier, the man who ran the local store and had once offered to purchase their honey. At the beginning of fall, Rostenmeier had even offered his advice to Klara about who might be interested.

"Dear Frau Hitler," he had said, "the way for your farm is to find a buyer who likes it for one reason—because it looks good. Is that not exactly why your husband bought it in the first place?"

"I will not say that has to be untrue," said Klara. (For her, this remark was equal to flirting with Herr Rostenmeier.)

"Yes," he said, "it is good you recognize this. I believe you will be able to sell your property to people who are less experienced at farming than yourselves, but—" he held up a finger—"more well-to-do, not so? You must have the patience to wait. Soon enough, one of these comfortable people will come along. And when he does, you send him to me. I will be your friend. I will know how to answer all the questions that come up."

The wealthy house-hunter did arrive, loved the look of the house and the farm, knew even less about the pitfalls than Alois, was sent to talk to Rostenmeier, and the sale took place. If the price presented no profit, neither did Alois suffer the loss he feared. The finality of the transfer convinced Alois-Senior that the end of this dream that he might live his last days on a farm could be put to rest with any other hopes that the oldest son would yet bring him some reason for pride. No! It was up to Adi. He was not nearly so lithe nor so strong as Alois-Junior, not nearly so good-looking, but as bright, perhaps, and he was obedient. Whistling for him had become a pleasure. The response was so quick.

In his heart, however, Alois-Senior did keep the equivalent of an old photograph. There still were nights when he would sit on the oak bench and

muse again on the Langstroth box he had built for himself. He would pat the seat as if to recall the sound of the slap he used to give that wooden box in the old days, yes, that nice and solid slap to stir up his bees.

If not for Angela, this would be all that remains to be said for Hafeld. But she was pining for Alois-Junior. She knew he would not come back, and so she could accept him as her model of a fine figure of a young man. He had always looked so handsome upon Ulan. She even began to play at the edge of an illicit dream. Of course, she was certain it would never go too far. Once in a while, she might allow her brother to dismount from the horse and kiss her. She soon learned, however, that the mind looks to betray the explorer. Before long, Angela began to think of one of the girls that Alois knew. This girl was always smiling at her now, as if she knew something special, and maybe Angela did as well.

By early spring of 1897, after the family moved back to the outskirts of Linz, Angela had a room to herself and there, carefully hidden from everyone else, she kept the photograph that an itinerant photographer had taken of young Alois in the course of photographing all the members of the

family. Alois had been so pleased with this image of himself standing by his horse.

Angela had stolen the picture. That had been her way of paying Alois back for how he teased her when she was reluctant to get up on Ulan. Once the photo disappeared, she had sworn on a stack of bibles (which didn't exist for one moment in her mind) that she had no idea where it might be. She didn't care that he was suffering just as much as if he had lost a gold watch.

Now, Angela became prodigiously secretive about her hiding place for the photo. I mention this small redolence of the carnal attached by Angela to the fading brown portrait of Alois because three decades later, in 1927, her daughter, Geli Raubal, a young and nicely buxom blond beauty, would be entertained publicly by Adolf Hitler on many a night in Munich in one or another of the fine restaurants he was beginning to attend. While the intimate and perverse facts are yet to be related, it was not long before Adolf commenced to have an affair with his niece. By the time it terminated four years later on the day of her death (by murder or suicide was never established) he, Adolf Hitler, now a serious leader of a Nazi party much to

be reckoned with, had to go through some of the worst horrors of his life.

Geli Raubel had been the love of his life.

That is far down the road. History (for those who have lived in it for as long as myself) is seldom recalled as all-fascinating. It is such a bed of lies! That is the only reason I could recommend the life of a devil to would-be aspirants. We know so much about how it happens, how it really happens. Who could ever wish to lose such riches? Yet it is not inconceivable that this is exactly what I have done by revealing my relation to the Maestro. Let it never be said that the perversity of our natures bears no relation to the human nature from which, after all, we have ostensibly departed, that curious human nature which pushes its way into existence to the full accompaniment of urine and excrement, yet will later dream each night of a noble life.

End