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I must, however, speak first of the dream I installed in Adi's sleep on the Saturday night that preceeded Alois' meeting on Sunday with the beekeeper. This dream was put together by me in response to a direct order from the Maestro. I will add that creating a dream which is not connected to the dreamer's previous experiences is never routine. While we can, on special occasions, insert whole scenarios into our client's sleep, it is also true that dream-works produced ex nihilo make serious inroads on our budget. Moreover, when the client is young, there is risk involved. Cudgels who might be involved with the client can be more than troublesome if they become aware of what we are attempting. A set of

delicate manipulations calculated to alter no more than one small element in a subject's psyche should not be undertaken under battlefield conditions. Few people prosper from a nightmare.

It has been my experience that the installation of dreams that are as intense as nocturnal visions can deliver many desired effects, but success is best when one can work deliberately, proceeding in small steps over many a night in order not to arouse the Cudgels. Count on it, the angels react with fury to any dream we initiate. This has been true from the commencement of human existence. The D.K. feels it is paramount for him to command all dreams. Looking to control those primates whom He was inspiring to become humans, structured hallucinations proved essential. They sped up the process.

Much later, during what the Maestro calls The Jehovah Era (which is, by rough means, from 1200 B.C. to the advent of Jesus Christ) the D.K. not only disbursed a host of awards and punishments (occasionally by way of miracles) but more often through dreams, He would succeed in arousing visions in prophets and plebians alike. Thereby, He could drive His wards

on many a chosen route, often, I suspect, on not much more than an imperious whim.

Our entrance, however, into the developing life of humankind reduced such powers. No longer could Jehovah employ dreams so effectively. Now, given our use of them, dreams can rarely appear as visions. Rather, they invade sleep as jagged, broken-backed narratives—intrusions from one side interfere with the aims of the other.

The D.K.'s once imperious use of dreams has, therefore, been nullified. Rarely can His commands be delivered forthrightly now. Instead, the modern nocturnal episode provides the sleeper with a hint of oncoming disturbances. If a trusted friend is likely to soon prove treacherous, the dream can alert one to such a possibility. If, on the other hand, it is the dreamer who is ready to betray a close friend, the consequences of such an act can be dramatized through an imaginary scenario. Thereby, the D.K. has found a means to guide some of His human beings. The mock situations created by the dream may not be wholly comprehensible, but they do test the subject's ability to withstand intense anxiety. When successfully interpreted, the subject could become aware of how he or she possesses less

courage, less loyalty, less devotion, less love, or less health than previously assumed. The dream can now serve as a protective system to warn a man or woman away from situations they cannot dominate.

To the degree, however, that we are able to interfere, the average dream becomes a whirligig, a stew, a chaos left by the melee between the Cudgels and ourselves.

So, the task of creating a clear dream for a child required special attention. As I have remarked, the Maestro did not, for the most part, encourage elaborate ventures with children. It will be recalled that when the Hitler family made their move from Passau, I was instructed to cease paying attention to little Adolf. He and his family would now be monitored via milk-runs by my assistants. Except for the sole occasion when I had slipped into Alois' brain long enough to delve into his fascination with beekeeping, I had been working in that region of Austria with other clients. The information provided by my assistants about the Hitlers of Hafeld had proved adequate.

Now, a direct communication from the Maestro had arrived—I was to implant a particular dream into the head of our six-year-old. Etch was the

verb employed by the Maestro. "I want you," he said, "to etch Adi's brain with a permanent notion. You can probably gain open entrance. We have been quiescent in that direction for so long that I expect no interference from the Cudgels."

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The act itself took no more than a few minutes, but the preparation had not been simple. Etch, I will repeat, was the operative word. A fixed notion, once successfully installed, can attach the client to us more closely. But etching is not there for any devil to practice. It must be done with incisive strokes. Misapplied, it can unbalance the recipient.

I will go so far as to say that on this occasion, I was deft. Given the knowledge absorbed from the milk runs, I knew that Alois would soon be visiting this neighboring beekeeper, Der Alte, also known as Der Alte Zauberer—the Old Sorcerer. Or such was the name given him by neighboring peasants.

The term was an exaggeration. This old man was a hermit and highly eccentric. He could also be as mean as a winter wind, but on special occasions he might seem agreeable like any other purportedly warm old fellow. The peasants in Hafeld, having known him for decades, knew better. Nonetheless, he was the only apiculturist within a day's walk in any direction and commanded more than a little erudition about beekeeping.

What was most comfortable about Der Alte was that he had belonged to us for decades. In effect, he was an old pensioner. Moreover, he and Adi would be kin in odor, and so were likely to be unoffended by each other. The magnetic thrust of the dream soon suggested itself. Before they met, I would etch the boy's mind with a clear image of Der Alte.

As a matter of style, when it comes to dream-work, I have always been inclined to avoid baroque virtuositities. Modest scenarios are usually more effective. In this case, I satisfied myself by producing as close a presentation of Der Alte's face and voice as I could manage and then placed him into Adi's dream. For the setting, I used an image of one of the two rooms of the old man's hut, and made the yard visible through the window. The action of the dream could not have been more direct. As Der Alte led them inside his quarters, he fed Adi a spoonful of honey. I made certain the taste was exquisite on the boy's tongue. Adi awakened with wet pajamas from navel to knee and a whole sense of happiness. Stripping his wet night-clothing, a not unusual event, he went back into slumber, replaying the dream with his own small variations, looking to taste the honey again. In his mind, he was certain that he would soon meet Der Alte, and this

emboldened him to ask his father to take him along next morning. Alois, as I have remarked, was pleased.

Their conversation on the walk to the Sorcerer's house is yet to be recounted but I will choose to delay that long enough to say a little more about the Maestro's concept of etching. For example, we now knew that when Adi met Der Alte on this Sunday, he would feel a new sense of personal importance for he would now believe he had the power to peer into the future. Indeed, I balanced both sides of this oncoming relation, for I also instructed Der Alte to give the boy a taste of his finest honey, and do it directly on meeting him.

Be it said once more, this man, Magnus Rudiger, spoken of as Der Alte Zauberer, was in fact not much of an old sorcerer. His curses were neither remarkable nor effective. Whenever a sense of dread came to him from forces he could not name (usually from one or another branch of the Cudgels) he thought it was sufficient to lay a circle of salt around the table where he sat by himself in the kitchen. That, for all its picayune effect, was more effective at nudging us away than the Cudgels. Such minor clients can become an annoyance when they grow old.

Still, no neighbor was in a hurry to attack his self-esteem. Indeed, by way of his dress, his odor, his resonant, even reverberating, voice, and his compendious knowledge of bees, he did suggest that he was a magician. In this manner, he was able to safeguard his pride. On the other hand, he had little power to resist our occasional employment of him.

No surprise then that Adi, etched by the dream, was marked by the visit. His future belief that he could, on necessary occasions, be able to picture in advance (and most accurately) people he had not yet met, would become an asset for us.

We would exercise this device often during Adolf Hitler's service as an Army courier over the two years and more when he had to carry messages up to the trenches, then work his way back to Regimental Headquarters. Since his duties incurred real danger, his belief that he could anticipate the future, proved of no small assistance to his courage. Too soon to speak of that, however. His experiences as a soldier—a most complex amalgam of our magic, and his desperation and dedication—remain eighteen years away. For now, I will leave this discussion of dream-etching until it is necessary to discuss the practice again.

Rather, I will follow the conversation he had with his father on the walk to see Der Alte Zauberer. Alois, of course, did most of the talking, and was anticipating the meeting with no great confidence. It was never routine for Alois to encounter a man who knew more about a subject than himself.

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As they strode along at a good pace, Alois proceeded to supply Adi's head with so many new names and thoughts that before long the boy was twice breathless. He did not dare to lag behind by a step or a word. In turn, Alois, so rarely in the habit of spending time or thought on this little Adolf, was a hint short of breath himself. Over the years, he had packed enough rheumatism into his knees and enough smoke into his lungs to move as a rule with more deliberation. But now, the discovery that he could actually talk to the boy, offered a stimulus to his legs. It was not Alois' habit to harbor many sentiments toward his younger children, indeed, he never found fatherhood a subject of personal interest until Alois-Junior and Angela worked with him on the farm. Now, most unexpectedly, he did feel a sense of something not ordinary coming to him from this little one.

Adi, in his turn, was more than excited. To be in the company of his father! He had barely learned to spell but Alois stood before his eyes as MEIN VATER. Just so large was his recognition of the size, and the immanence of the heavy man beside him. Alois aroused in him the same kind of awe that came over the expression of his mother when she would speak of der Gute Gott.

How the boy wanted to please Alois! At the start of the walk, their mutual silence had been formidable, and it remained so until Adi found the words. "Have there always been bees?" he asked at last. It was a simple question but fortuitous.

"Yes. Always. Bees," Alois amended, "have been on our fine earth for a long time."

"They go very far back, Father?"

Alois gave him an encouraging pat on the nape of his neck. The boy's obvious desire to keep the conversation in flow now served to activate Alois' funds of exposition. "Yes, I would say. Maybe for a longer time than us. And there has never been a day when we didn't look to steal their honey." He laughed at the extent of his own insight. "Back in the time of

the Bronze Age, already we were eating honey, yes, and I can say for certain that I have seen some old drawings in glass cases right there in the old Linz museum, going back into the Middle Ages, that show how beekeeping had become a serious activity. Although wild, very wild then."

Despite his touch of rheumatism, Alois was certainly walking fast. Adi's breath was now seizing his lungs in a unique mixture of happy fervor at the fact of the conversation itself, and the desperation that he might not be able to keep walking (half-running) at his father's pace. So many unfamiliar words were coming into his mind at once. This past August, while standing under the walnut tree nearest their farmhouse, a gale of wind came by like the crack of a whip, whereupon three walnuts, hard as stone, had pelted his head with such authority that he did not even dare to cry—it was as if the walnuts told him to be silent. Now, he was buffeted by the Bronze Age, and next, the Middle Ages—maybe he had heard "Middle Ages before". He felt as if he might know it. Charlemagne, maybe. No question of stopping to ask—he strode along as fast as he could, the air burning in his lungs.

"They had," said Alois, "no hives in the Middle Ages. They had to go out hunting to where they could find a swarm of bees gathered together.

Where? Where else? In hollow trees. Locate such a tree, and then grab what you can of the honey before the bees sting your head off. That was how good men must have done it then. Only, that was not enough. They also had to scoop up the wax. This beeswax was just as important. With beeswax, you could have light for your hut. Every night. Candles! But, oh, they had to pay. So many bites. Then along would come their Duke or their Baron. If he heard about your honey, you had to pay up. A good share he took. Imagine. What do you think he gave you back?—a bow, a nice strong cross-bow. Why? Because the bears in the forest were also looking for honey. Think how crazy those bees must have got when a bear stuck his nose right in to lap up their hive. It is one thing to sting a man, but how do you stop a bear? A bear with his thick skin! They had to go for the eyes. It didn't matter. The bear would still come looking. So, a man needed a cross-bow—to kill the bear. Not so easy to go near honey if the bear got there first, but you could have compensation. Sometimes you had bear meat. Once in a while, you had bear meat and honey."

Adi's breath was by now on fire. Their path was passing through a small wood, and he was on the lookout for a bear. One more fear to lay on the tumult in his lungs.

"Sometimes," said Alois, "on a cold day this time of year a man would find a tree ready to fall, a dead tree with a big hollow in it, and a swarm of bees clustered right there in the hollow, trying to stay warm against the cold. Well, an enterprising fellow might dare to take the tree down. He would have to do it carefully. Don't stir up too much! He would have to do it in the evening when bees are more quiet, especially when it is cold, and then he and his son, or maybe his brother, would carry the tree back near their hut, where they could manage to extract the rest of the honey."

"What about the bears? Would they come?"

"Yes. The kind of man we're talking about had to be ready to kill the first bear and hang him up near the bees. That kept other bears away. This is exactly how it began. But now, what is it? What has it become? A hobby! A little risky, maybe, but profitable."

"Hobby," the boy repeated—another new word.

"Soon," said Alois, "it will be a business."

They walked in silence. Der Steckenpferd was how Alois had put it—a horse-on-a-stick, a plaything, a hobby. Soon it would be a business, he had said. The boy was confused. Their rapid pace was now pinching his breath past the point where he could ask even one more question.

Abruptly, Alois stopped. He had become aware at last of his son's discomfort. "Come," he said, "you sit down." He pointed to a rock, then sat next to him on another rock. Only then did he feel the pain in his own knees and legs.

"You must understand," he said, "this bee-keeping will not be fairy-tales for us. Honey is sweet, but bees are not always so sweet. Sometimes they are cruel to each other. Very cruel. Do you know why?"

"No," said Adi. His eyes were, however, alight. "Please, you must tell me why, Father."

"Because they obey one law. It is so clear to them. This law says: Our colony must survive. So, nobody can dare to be lazy. Not inside this hive of bees." He paused. "Nobody, except for the drones. They are there

to serve their one good purpose. But then it's all over for them. They are gone. Goodbye."

"Are they killed?" The boy knew the answer.

"Killed. Of course. All of those drones. Once a year, right about now—just after summer they are gotten rid of. No charity." He began to laugh again. "In the home of the bees, there are no good Christians. No charity whatsoever. You will not find one bee in any hive who is too weak to work. That is because they get rid of cripples early. They obey one law and it sits on top of everything."

But as they rested, Alois drew back into silence. He was feeling some dread. The neighboring peasants had praised Der Alte, they had echoed each other concerning his vast knowledge of this subject of apiculture. Yet Alois could hear no allegiance to the man himself. Now, he was afraid of being cheated by Der Alte.

This was but one hint of his fear. If the attractive location of the farm had been his good reason for its purchase, he could not say the same for the land. He did not wish to be cheated again. Indeed, he had kept putting off the decision to go into beekeeping. Now, August was lost. It might even be

too late to start a winter colony. He must buy and buy soon. He might even have to pay an unnatural price. He certainly did not enjoy the thought of these peasants laughing at him, but that was not his prime uneasiness. He could not quite admit it to himself, but the last time he had been in the bee business, going at it as a horse-on-a-stick, just one hive, a skep he kept in a little town at walking distance from Braunau, a place he could go to in the evening as a respite from the tavern and his fellow officers, or visit on Sunday in order not to have to watch everyone going to church. But then he had a near disaster. On a given Sunday, because of no mistake he could recognize, he had been stung quickly and repeatedly by so many infuriated bees that he decided afterward he must have been poking about in the Queen Bee's quarters. Who could tell with a skep? Straw has so little shape! He realized his ignorance of the real stuff. In the course of working with that straw hive, he had been open to ambush.

But he knew. He could tell. He was preparing in advance to recount to this man, Der Alte, that he had once taken many stings on his hands and his knees and that the event had actually proved beneficial to the stiffness in his joints. For certain, he felt ready to impress Der Alte with his

understanding of bee venom. He would speak of the degree to which diseases in ancient Egypt and Greece had even been treated in that manner. He would speak of the Romans, Pliny and Galen. Great doctors. They knew how to make ointments from bee venom and bee honey. Charlemagne and Ivan the Terrible could also be cited. He would speak of these monarchs' afflictions of the joints and how they had had such pain eliminated, or so it was reputed, by bee stings.

But was he really prepared to enter such a conversation with Der Alte? When you got down to it, this might not be the next correct step to take. What if Der Alte happened to be more knowledgeable on this matter than himself?

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As I have indicated, Der Alte is one of ours. I have called him a pensioner and that is also accurate. In recent years, we have hardly used him, and any benefits he received from us were small. From time to time, we offer a new insight to one of his old perceptions, (a species of gift-giving practiced by angels and demons alike) and usually able to revive the faded confidence of the client's mind. Certainly, the old doctor obeyed with dispatch and was there to put a spoonful of exquisite honey on Adi's tongue even as father and son came through the door.

Now, I may refer occasionally to Der Alt as Herr Doktor, but I consider it one of his more unseemly vanities. He will insist that he is an honored and

learned university graduate. I have heard him refer on separate occasions to his years at Heidelberg, Leipzig, Gottingen, Vienna, Salzberg, and Berlin, none of whose eminent schools he attended. Indeed, only Heidelberg and Gottingen ever saw him, and that was for a brief visit. Our old and learned doctor is a fraud, a half-Jewish Pole, of no certified higher education who, nonetheless, much through his own efforts, has acquired some of the verbal skills and superior manner of a tried-and-true Doctor of Philosophy. If he has chosen in his old age to look like a confirmed drunk, an odd choice, since in fact he does not drink, he is attracted all the same to many of the slovenly habits of old sots. His clothes are filthy. Even his long woolen cap manages to be full of soup stains (for he wipes his mouth with the tail of it) and his white beard is discolored with nicotine. He not only smells of the unhappy scents we look to reduce in our clients, but to put no pretty word on it, he is incontinent. Even his furnishings, let alone his garments, retain the harsh persona of old urine.

Nonetheless, he is striking. That long stocking cap which he even wears indoors in summer does serve some devoted image of himself as a court jester. And indeed, there is an old cape full of faded bright colors, a

fool's motley. One could hardly expect him to be impressive in his person, yet he is. Undeniably. His eyes are extraordinary, as blue as the coldest skies of the north, yet full of lights that offer a clue to many a trick he has learned.

For forty years Alois had encountered hundreds of people a day, and so was hardly to be surprised by an unorthodox appearance. Moreover, he had developed an ability to capture the first moment in just about every passing exchange. Travelers were not prepared for the phenomenon of meeting a Customs official who possessed such a degree of authority and few were prepared for the intelligence that stood out in his immediate glance. "Try to fool me—you will fail!" was the unmistakable sentiment offered by his eyes.

This was a prime reason for my direction to Der Alte that he must meet the father and son at the door with a spoonful of honey, and insert it without leave into the boy's mouth. Whatever Alois had been preparing for, it could hardly have been this. So rude. So gracious. And both at once! Nothing was offered to Alois but a superior smile from Der Alte as if his piss-soaked den, worse than an abode of fifteen cats, was nonetheless Der

Alte's realm and he was happy in it, and, I may as well add, diabolically unembarrassed.

Der Alte won the boy on the instant. It took no more than this one move placed on top of my dream-etching. Adi's eyes were alive with the same intensity of admiration that Alois had been receiving from his son during their walk together.

They sat down. The old man fussed a little (albeit most skillfully) at preparing tea. To Alois' further discomfort, the procedure was courtly. A very old gentleman, or even a very old lady, might have been demonstrating to an unsophisticated visitor the putative elegance of a tea ceremony.

All the same, I do not approve of Der Alte. For all his gifts, he has never accomplished much for us, not as much as I had anticipated. For a time I had expected he would become one of my prize clients. He certainly did not have to end as a bizarre, impossibly smelly hermit with an immense reputation for dealing with hives of bees in a pretty little corner of Austria, a country filled already with pretty little corners. I had lost standing with the Maestro by remarking decades ago, that I saw promise in this young half-Polish, half-Jewish Magnus. Of course, he was at that time a pagan with

the ladies. As far as I was concerned, he was by now one client who had settled for too little.

Der Alte took his tea in little sips, Alois in three scalding gulps. That enabled his host to pour him a quick second cup (a most subtle reproof). Only then did they begin to talk about the purpose of the visit. Alois began by citing Pliny and Galen, after all, then Charlemagne, and Ivan the Terrible. He spoke in a most moving manner of the afflictions of the two great monarchs and the dedication of Pliny and Galen—two medical geniuses who had known how to deal with ailments so grievous that others could find no cure. It was not, he would vouchsafe, that he, personally, had suffered inhumanly from gout or from rheumatism, merely, you could say, that he had received a few intimations that there could be future miseries. He had, however, learned a great deal on one particular occasion when he had been prey to an unprecedented attack, "just the one time, but with many bites to the knees which subsequently provided considerable easement against the first pains of rheumatism. I admit that I would have given much to be a medical scientist for then I could have begun research on just this

subject. I am even sufficiently confident of myself to believe I would probably have made significant discoveries."

"Just so," said Der Alte, "you might, you might very well have done just that. Because, dear sir, what you then believed was there to be discovered has indeed been detected by no less a figure than Dr. Likomsky back in 1864, thirty-one years ago when you were still a young man, and I might also mention Doctor Terc who put the crowning cap on what could have been your thesis. Yes! Herr Doctor Terc came forth with serious chemical studies on the nature of bee venom and its as-yet-undeveloped potential for precisely these valuable cures. Rheumatism and gout might both be seen by now as ailments of the past if not for the innumerable obstacles which present themselves in the way of administering treatment. We are still looking for more precise positioning of the bee sting onto the affected body. It is rumored that the Chinese"—now with a melting look designed to add to the mutual delight that existed already between him and the boy he added, "the Chinese who live on the other side of the earth from us. Have you heard?" he asked.

Adi nodded solemnly. He had heard of the Chinese, heard of them in his one-room school house during the hour when Fraulein Werner instructed the geography class on the specific placement of India and China upon the great continent of Asia.

"Yes, in that far-off near-mythical land, esteemed Finance-Watch Chief Officer Herr Hitler, it is said that these Chinese employ the power to puncture possessed by sharp needles to alleviate gout, an excellent solution I would think, since the least attractive aspect of my beloved bees is their eagerness to sting, yes, we love them for their honey, but not necessarily for their haste in the course of defending themselves against us, they succeed with their sting even as they surrender their lives."

Alois sensed that he would do well to leave this topic. The tea had left a penetrating aroma in his nostrils which, to his surprise, was compatible with the urine. Needless to say, he would have preferred a good swallow of beer to pump a few of his prepared remarks up into more forceful delivery, but as of now, this conversation did belong to Der Alte. At what length he went on!

"I cannot," he remarked, "begin to call you my good friend as yet. For I do not know you. Except, of course, by way of your fine reputation. Word of your former most respected position precedes our meeting. Your father," he now said to Adi, "is well-regarded by all, but"—and he was now back, once more, to Alois—"I am still ready to call you my friend because I feel in myself an imperative to counsel you, for, oh, I must say, there is, dear sir, so much to learn about these bees and their good keeping." He sighed with a sound of woe physically intimidating in its resonance.

"Let me note that I would not wish in any manner to impose on your pride." He stopped. Since a man's pride was involved, he would proceed no further without a laisser-passer.

"No, tell me, good Doctor, you must tell me what you think," said Alois, his voice most normal (to the degree he could command it) but his nostrils were near to quivering. He hardly knew if he was at the onset of an intolerable sense of woe or whether a true burden was about to be lifted. What could be this imposition on his pride?

"Given your gracious permission, I would say that I must caution you about your honorable and honest desire to enter the endless vagaries of

apiculture. It is, you see, a vocation." He nodded. He turned again to Adi as if the boy was one more equal, yes, all three sitting there quite alike in implicit stature. "You, little fellow," Der Alte said, "you, who looks so smart, are you smart enough to know what a vocation might be?"

"No," said Adi, "but maybe I do. Yes. Almost."

"You do. You know it even before you are aware that you know it. That is the first sign of a truly intelligent person, not so?" Der Alte's voice vibrated into the tender pit of Adi's stomach.

"A vocation," said Der Alte, "is not something you do because others tell you that this is what you must do. Not so. With a vocation, there is no choice. You give all that you have to doing whatever has become important to you. 'Yes,' says the vocation, 'you must do it.'"

"I would not wish to dispute your learned words," said Alois, "no, I do not wish to commence a dispute, but surely one can keep a hive without building a monastery. For myself, I foresee no more than a modest investment for a retired man like myself."

"Dear sir, it cannot and will not ever be that way," said Der Alte. "That much I can promise a strong person like yourself. Heartbreak or

happiness. Nothing between." He nodded with all the profundity of the decades he had continued to present himself as a great and learned doctor. "Herr Hitler, I cannot allow you to consider such a project until you are made fully aware of the risks that await you, the diseases and mortal enemies that surround our delicate sweet-seeking bees. After all, the honey they make is to the world of nature an exact equivalent of gold. So many of the creatures of nature, large and small, are jealous of the life of these remarkable little creatures who are not only able to make honey but dwell constantly amidst that golden and intoxicating presence. In consequence, honey-bees are hated. They are pursued and entrapped. I can inform you of one genus of spider who is evil, nothing less. Die Krabbe-Spinne, it is called. So soon as it finds a promising flower, this creature ensconces itself deep within the small perfumed cavern of the bloom. There the crab-spider waits. I would suppose he even feels at home. He proceeds to activate the scent of this flower by stirring about in those blessed folds of the corolla; soon, its own awful odor is concealed by the intoxicating elixir of the petals. What then? The crab-spider waits. When the forager-bee, our sweet hard-working female with its undeveloped ovaries—only the Queen, as we know,

is completely in possession of that most mysterious avatar of female existence!—ach, these other females are there to work for the length of their short lives. So here, contemplate this poor little forager. Our honey-bee smells the inimitable redolence of the flower's cavern. She enters, full of greed, to pick up her lusty store of nectar and pollen and, at once, she is done in. Cruelly! Sadistically! For, the poor bee is not killed, but is certainly half-gone. She has been paralyzed by a sting from the crab-spider, and so must stay there, numb and incapable of saving herself, whereupon the spider, altogether without mercy, proceeds to sup on the vital liquids and subtle constituents of the bee's internal elements. When nothing is left but the dry whisper of a husk, this crab spider goes to the actual labor of ejecting the remains from the flower, after which, it ensconces itself in all the bliss of sleep, yes, a successful destroyer's slumbers, doubtless, sated, all sated, in the corolla."

Adi would dream for weeks of the bee, the flower, and more than one evil bug. Additional detail was to come. Der Alte described the bee-wolf, a wasp who would strike at the honeybee just as it was alighting on a flower. The bee-wolf would always go for the throat. "Always. The honeybee has a

soft throat. So once again, our forager is paralyzed. The wasp is now in complete command. She proceeds to squash the belly of the honeybee in order to disgorge all the nectar that hard-working little being has already taken into herself. This nectar squeezed up from the belly overflows out of the bee's mouth into the maw of the bee-wolf. Is that enough? No. This female brute is now ready for the labor of flying off with her stricken victim. She transports this paralyzed and ruptured little creature to a nest most specially prepared. There, she lays this capture down next to as many as six or eight still-living but wholly stricken other honey-bees who have been caught earlier. Then the wasp deposits into this same crypt one egg, one solitary egg who will feed on these live, but unmoving bees. Before long, this larvae, well-fed is ready to come forth as one more bee-wolf now that the stricken bodies have served as nutrients for her growth, ingested, piece by piece, limb by limb. But how were these bees preserved? And the answer is by nature itself! Our so-called good and wise system of nature can show nonetheless all the cunning of the cruelest maniac. It is the venom in the wasp's sting that preserves the flesh of these paralyzed bees, and thus

monstrous. A glorious victory. But what then can they do with the captured?

keeps them alive for days while one hungry little wasp-to-be becomes a bee-wolf.

"I have offered these two exceptional cases as lively examples of the perils to the life of any colony you may hope to protect. There are so many enemies. A skunk will fret his claws on the front wall of a hive until the guardian bees within must come forth to repel him. These soldier-guards are heroic, but futile. They are swallowed en masse. Toads wait beneath to pick up the droppings. Another variety of spider will wrap cocoons about each bee that happens to fly right into its web. Ants may invade your hive. I have seen colonies where the bees are obliged to tolerate the ants, and will even surrender a portion of their territory in order that these rude invaders do not attack the combs that hold the future brood. With mice, it is worse. In summer, they loot the combs directly for the honey. In winter, they move into the hive seeking warmth, then proceed to construct a mouse-nest in one or another corner. When the most valiant of our home guard attack the intruder, they can on occasion succeed by the force of sheer numbers. So, yes, it is not impossible. They actually can sting to death the invading monster. A glorious victory. But what then can they do with the carcass?

To them, it is larger than Leviathan. Just so soon as the mouse begins to decompose, the hive becomes intolerable. So the bees proceed to cover this rotting presence with disinfectant. Contemplate their fabulous skill. They have managed to manufacture such a necessary substance from pollen plus a few chosen green buds. Have you heard of it? This propolis?"

"Certainly," said Alois. "They also know to use propolis for mending cracks in their walls." He was so pleased at not being disconcerted.

"I see," said Der Alte, "that I have failed to discourage you."

"I live by the law of averages," said Alois. "I prefer to think of the ongoing possibility of profit rather than of the occasional perils that surround all such activity."

"Does the bee-wasp frighten you?" asked the old man of the boy.

Adi nodded, but then was quick to say, "If my father is ready to do this, then so must I be."

"You have a splendid son," said Der Alte.

Alois was ready to agree for the first time that this might be a possibility. How nice it was to learn that his little Adolf was more than a bed-wetter. Might he even be the equal of Alois-Junior one of these days?

But thoughts of Alois-Junior invariably reminded him of all that was not yet in place. So now Alois wondered why Der Alte had been seeking to discourage him. It made no sense. Given the state of his hut, the old man could use the money. Why then scorn a potential customer's desire to invest?

For the first time, he felt as if he had a grasp on Der Alte. The hermit understood him better than others, decided Alois. "He knows that I am a man who looks to keep his pride intact. I do not give way to the first warning. So Der Alte must know that the more he discourages me, the more I will be ready to begin my colony. He will have his money after all."

Alois now gave Der Alte what he considered his largest and most confident smile. "I respect your cautions," he said, "but we must move now to the other side of the question. Can we speak of what you will do for me, and what I can do for you?"

"Not quite yet, said Der Alte. "If you wish to remain a man with a modest little hobby, I will, of course, be available for necessary materials. But I see in you, Sir, if I may speak on a more personal level, the possibility of a true vocation. So, I would propose another consideration, a better

approach. To learn my metier, I put in an apprenticeship that continued for three years, but provided me with an advanced license. What I would propose to you is a more collegial relationship—may I put it so?—I am prepared over the next few years, for the most modest fees, to have you associated with me as I work on my colonies. It could prove an agreeable arrangement. You will learn much, and I will have the pleasure of an intelligent man's company. It is sad to say, but in all these verdant fields that surround our Hafeld, we are the only two individuals of outstanding intelligence."

Alois kept a smile on his face but his nostrils were paying their own tithe. "Work for years with you, you foul-smelling old goat?" was the speech he did not utter. There was, after all, the need to come to an arrangement with the old mountebank.

In turn, I was horrified. No professional has a greater desire for competence than a devil. I had been incompetent here. Der Alte might be a pensioner, but I had neglected him for too long. The loneliness revealed in these last remarks was like the chill in an unoccupied house. How intense was the old man's yearning to see more of Adi. No bold move is ever free

of unplanned turns. Calculated mischief might be our province, but was certainly not there for a client. Not if we could prevent it. We look to direct the romantic habits of our fold, rather than have to correct them. Any future episode between the old man and the boy would not be to the Maestro's liking. Too many indeterminables!

At this point, Alois said, "I am honored by your personal interest in me, but I must explain. In my family, we are blockheads. All of us, blockheads. We are even proud of that. So, I must work alone. That is how I am. I look forward, therefore, to enjoying a mutually agreeable commercial relationship."

Der Alte nodded. He, too, had his pride. He would not repeat his suggestion.

"Yes," he said, "we will make arrangements. I will put together a couple of colonies for you and supply those tools and products you do not have in hand already." He turned to Adi. "Soon your father will be very busy. Are you able to count to one thousand?"

"Yes," said Adi. "They do that in the Upper Class at school, and so I know."

"Good. Because this spring your father will be master of many, many thousands of bees. Will you be afraid of them? Are you ready?"

"I am afraid," said Adolf, "but you know, I am also ready."

"A wonderful boy," said Der Alte, and his expression was full of love. Tears came into Adi's eyes. His mother would soon have another baby, and again it would be the same as when Edmund was born. He would not see the love he wanted to find in her eyes when she was looking at him. Not for a while.

-4-

I must now inform the reader of an unexpected summons from the Maestro that removed me from Alois Hitler and his family for close to eight months. Indeed, it took me out of Austria altogether. I can add that this alert arrived on the same evening early in October of 1895 that Alois completed his apicultural negotiations. A colony of bees installed in each of two Langstroth boxes were purchased from Der Alte, as well as a variety of tools, together with enough sealed jars of pollen and honey to feed his newly-acquired inhabitants through the winter.

So soon as purchased, the goods were transported by Alois to the Hitler home. It was to prove an exciting trip for Adi who sat beside his

father in the dray and could not sleep that night in anticipation of morning when the hive-boxes would be set up on a bench under the shade of an oak tree some twenty paces from the house.

If there is some curiosity concerning how much these purchases cost, I have no dependable way to carry a calculation forward from the kronen of Alois' era to the present American dollar—certain products are priced one hundred times higher today than a century ago; other increases were restrained. I will offer one rough estimate: Alois' pension in 1895 may have been the equivalent of sixty or seventy thousand dollars a year in the present era, and so I can say that he found the new expenditures dear. What Der Alte charged him might be the equal today of a thousand dollars. Alois, fully anticipating that he would pay too much, was weary, nonetheless, of dealing with the old man and so did not press beyond the small satisfaction of acquiring a few extra tools at no cost.

It was at this point that I was ordered to leave Adi and the other members of the family (as well as my other clients in that area of Austria.) Three of my agents were deputized to remain and I left at once for St. Petersburg where we would embark on a massive oncoming project. We

would attend the Coronation of Tsar Nicholas the Second, scheduled for May of 1896 in Moscow, an event still these many months away.

Off to St. Petersburg. Leave it that I was obliged immediately upon arrival to commence my study of the late Nineteenth Century Russian soul, all of it—belly, vices, beliefs, harmonies and inner disharmonies. Once in that Slavic realm, (which is so much nearer to God and to the Devil than any other land above the equator) I stayed for all of a winter in the capitol prior to coming down to Moscow on a cold April morning one month in advance of the Coronation that May.

During these seven months in St. Petersburg, I did receive news regularly of Alois, Adi, Klara, and Angela. There were even reports on the temperament of the dog, Luther, and the horses, Ulan and Graubart. In any event, none of that was of great interest to me, not at all, what with our Russian venture approaching. The Maestro was obviously in the first stages of laboring to bring off a major and mighty mischief.

I will now make an apology, although I will do my best not to repeat it. (Good readers do not purchase novels, after all, to put up with the author's regrets.) I will say that having read the best and worst of novels for

many years, which is, to remind you, part of a good devil's education, I know by now that not even a loyal reader can stay true to an author who is ready to leave his narrative for an apparently unrelated expedition. Until now, I have spared the reader, therefore, any reference to other cases, particularly the month I spent in London back in May of '95 when I attended the trial of Oscar Wilde and was in the courtroom on the day of his conviction for "sodomy and gross indecency"—a matter in which I certainly played a hand with the jury's deliberations since my instructions were to do my best to get him convicted. It is likely that the Maestro was looking to stimulate a rabid sense of martyrdom among many of Wilde's intimate associates, particularly those who were of good family.

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I have yet to describe the disorder we planned to wreak in the wake of the Coronation of Tsar Nicholas the Second, but I would prefer to stay with an account of the small events and minor adventures of the Hitler family in Hafeld while I was away. Only then will I feel free to return to our activities in St. Petersburg and Moscow. I will say that the eight months from my departure in October 1895 until my return to Austria in June 1896 was a period of personal importance for Adolf Hitler, and so I feel bound to relate what took place during my absence.

There is, however, a difficulty. During my absence, reports of the various experiences of Alois, Klara, and the children were passed on to me

by low-level agents—the three I had left behind to oversee my portion of the Province of Upper Austria. Given the import of our mission to Russia, I had, of course, taken the best assistants along. So my knowledge of what was taking place in Hafeld had to suffer a loss. Lesser devils, like lesser humans, can be insensitive to significant detail.

While I can obtain a good notion of what is happening to my clients even when I have to rely on what is given to me by mediocre agents, the work does lose tone. Nonetheless, my narrative will not suffer too critically. Long in advance of my departure, I had succeeded in bringing all my aides up to a reasonable level of perception. I say this with pride. They had so little to offer when they first came to me. I am, however, not eager to explain our means of recruitment. It would bring us immediately into a more sacrosanct question: How do devils come to be in the first place? Is the Evil One on the alert for superior humans who might be ready to work for us, or, as is more usually the case, do they arrive as a brood of rejected humans? How this arrangement was negotiated between the D.K. and the Maestro is as I have already indicated, beyond my knowledge. I cannot declare why or when it happened, but I would suppose from my experience

that the Maestro, looking to make his way up onto a plane of equality with the D.K., had to be ready to accept a good deal of exudate—all these spoiled human possibilities. Over the centuries, over—it well may be—the millennia, the Maestro had to disburse a very large share of his resources on the Time needed to train the disturbed material we do receive. It is analogous in difficulty to working up a symphony orchestra from applicants who have yet to play an instrument.

I will not pursue these difficulties here. I will only say that the agents I left in Hafeld did their best to report on Alois' ongoing efforts at bee-keeping, but since they did not always have a close enough sense of his difficulties, they could not always satisfy my understanding of what went on with him, his bees, his wife, and his children from the end of 1895 until the following summer.

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In late October, if I had permitted it, the agents I had left behind would have overwhelmed me with detail about Alois. To my complete lack of surprise, he was having obsessions concerning his new venture.

Being in Russia, I had no time to attend to this. Short of forcing a direct entrance into Alois' waking thoughts which, it may be remembered, is rarely done with men and women who are not our clients, my agents had to work by way of their milk runs. In what our Maestro chooses to call "the markets of sleep," most dreams of men and women are reasonably open to

devils and Cudgels alike, and so their daily thoughts can be picked up in superficial degree by no more than passing through the night chamber.

We also learn a good deal through the simple expedient of listening to a family's chatter. To be sure, a plethora of superficial information now arrived, more than enough to annoy me. It was a biased portrait. My agents perceived Alois as weak and much too worried, but they lacked insight for dealing with men or women who possess strength, yet are being studied during a time of anxiety. It is easy to comprehend people who are weaker than ourselves, but it is not as simple to be ready for the true feelings of those more powerful. A sense of nuance is demanded, precisely what my locals were lacking.

Being of no great stature themselves in their former lives, they tended to pick up all that was second-rate in Alois. I was left, therefore, with the burden of discounting such improperly weighted materials. I would abjure the reader. We must not forget that the boy who later became Adolf Hitler emerged from a childhood with this father and mother. So, it has to be obvious that we would do well to take measure of Klara and Alois' strengths as well as, needless to say, their significant weaknesses.

Very well. Here then is my developed if second-hand account of Alois' woes now that he is becoming a bee-keeper.

His first concern (which I find comic—since he has spent his life in uniform) is that he has to remind himself constantly to put on light-colored gloves and a bee-keeper's large hat and veil, always of the whitest material. Since he must avoid dark coats or trousers, when that is his customary dress, he is always concerned in these first days to remember to change his garments before going out to the hive-boxes. Deep and somber colors, he knows all too well, do irritate bees. He knows that by experience. On the particular occasion some years ago when he had been gravely stung while working with the little colony he then kept near Braunau, he had made the mistake of inviting an attractive woman out with him one Sunday afternoon. As an element in his plan of seduction, he thought he would demonstrate not only his competence with the hive, but his elegance. Therefore, he was in full dress dark blue uniform. That twilight he was stung so fiercely that the recollection still rises from the pit of his stomach. Alois' hopes of fornication were obliged to remain unsatisfied that Sunday, indeed, the lady was stung as well, and on no less than the exposed flesh of her ample breast.

Only a passing romance was lost, but a blow was given to his best opinion of himself. As we see, he continues to pay the price. Dressed in white, shoots of fear, bright as rockets, fire off nonetheless in his stomach whenever he approaches the hive boxes.

In some part, however, Alois remains a good peasant. He has not forgotten that one must remain on the alert after any small disaster. Unexpected value can be gained at times from the misfortune. His interesting medical theses, for example, were stimulated by the alleviation of his rheumatism on the following day—bee stings did seem to be good for his knees. When their meeting occurred, Der Alte, we remember, was ready to agree.

This confirmation could have been part of Alois' decision to accept Der Alte's opinion that imported Italian bees were superior to the Austrian variety. While Alois had his suspicion that Der Alte might be selling exactly some stock that he wished to get rid of, still, the telling point was that Italian bees were easier to handle. They were gentler, Der Alte assured him. Moreover, their rich yellow tan, not unlike the mellow glow of the best shoe leather, made them more beautiful. Alois had to admire the three

golden segments of their bodies, each set off by the sharpest edging in black. Chic! That was the word that came to mind. Whereas the Austrian honey-bee was gray and hairy. It did not gleam like these gilded Italians. Afterward, Alois felt as if he had been disloyal. He should have taken the "Franz Josefs," the gray-beards.

What added to his unease is that he kept wondering whether he would have done better to wait for spring? Now, he had to keep his colony warm enough not to perish in the cold.

Through these months, therefore, he would have to take the temperature within the hive every day. He had even been advised to record the daily and weekly data. Yet, he must not open any hive. "No matter your curiosity," Der Alte had confided, "you must not allow yourself to peer in, or extract any of the movable frames for study of the combs. Why, the cold draft that could arise from lifting the large lid of the box might so lower the temperature that your bees would need hours to warm the interior again. Such a chill could decimate your population. Take no chances, Herr Hitler. Until now, from what you have told me, I assume that in the past, you have lived with bees only in June and July. Any tourist can do that. But to be the

Skipper of your little people through the ice-cold air of all the winter months to come, that takes character, my friend." And then as if to enrich the assumption, he added, "My new friend."

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If Alois had stood in the dock before himself as judge, he would have found the defendant guilty. How could retirement prove so enfeebling to a strong man? He had bought the farm on impulse and now, to double such a bet, had purchased two bee-hives in their Langstroth boxes. Why, so suddenly, had he committed himself to apiculture over the winter? Hadn't that also been done on too quick an impulse? Der Alte had had the consummate nerve to say to him, even as Alois left, "You will soon see how much work I have saved you."

What Alois saved in work, he spent in worry. He was still under sixty, damn it, not yet sixty by a year and more, but he felt such a sense of inner weariness before these new responsibilities. His two populated boxes were now set under the oak tree with tarpaper underneath for warmth, and

more tarpaper above, all kept in place with stones. Two populations housed in two boxes. Each day he read the temperature in each box, and did his weighing once a week. Part of the problem was that he had more worries than work. All through the dark months while feeding his winter bees (a tricky technique), he would decide that should the colonies look weak when spring came, he would combine two boxes into one, and, if necessary buy more bees, undertake more expense, more of Der Alte, who would be smelling up his pants, no doubt, from laughing so hard at the great esteemed High Customs Officer Herr Hitler with his ten thumbs all ready to be stung by what he didn't know about bees. Already, in November, Alois was lecturing Angela and Adi, even Klara, on the need in apiculture for immaculate hygiene once warm weather arrived. No matter how warm the day, they must certainly not leave the hives open. Above all, they must never spill honey outdoors. If they did, they must mop it up instantly, for the bees could be drawn to it and might begin to fight for free honey, easy honey, as it lay in a pool on the ground. If the puddle were deep enough, they could drown en masse.

So, his fears were enough to harangue his family on what might or might not occur in summer. So much depended on what he read each night on how to keep a winter hive.

He did build one new hive box which he did not need as yet, but was proud of the skill demanded. He also had to admit that his box was not the equal of the Langstroths.

Yet the work eased his worries. His chest even puffed up again with an old truism. "Good German blood understands," said Alois to his wife, "that blessings do not come from God, but from hard work." Still, it was not such a very good remark. Why not speak instead of Austrian blood?

That question came to bother him. Did certain blood possess special virtues? Why, indeed, praise German blood? Why not Austrian? He had an Emperor who could live with the huge (and often) idiotic problems of keeping Czechs, Hungarians, Italians, Poles, Jews, Serbs, plus gypsies, living in peace under one Hapsburg empire. Germans couldn't do that. Germans were always squabbling. Without Bismarck, they would be nothing. Petty principalities. Mad King Ludwig I is followed by Mad King Ludwig II, both crazy Bavarians. And Prussians were worse. Prussians had

a ramrod up their ass. Why speak then of good German blood? "Because," he said to himself, "I know what it means."

Yet what did it mean to decide you knew something when you didn't, not quite. Although in some way you most certainly did. A nice enigma. Alois decided that he was now thinking like a philosopher. Not bad for a boy who was once a peasant. He was tempted to bring up the question at the tavern in Fischlham, but didn't, after all. They were dolts. He resented the time he spent with them. By November, he had even found himself drinking there in the afternoons, a proof, if he needed it, that there was not enough work. For that reason, he had chosen to stay away for a few days, and hang some netting near the hives to keep birds away in the spring. He even debated whether to visit Der Alte, but recollections of the smell put an end to that.

Before long, he was back in the tavern. There was one pleasure he did find there. The dolts now saw him as an expert on apiculture. Every bit of advice Der Alte had offered, plus whatever nuggets he had picked up of late in his reading, were now presented as his own well-acquired lore. Alois would be the first to say that honesty and modesty were excellent virtues,

and should be employed when dealing with superiors. An inferior mind, however, wanted—especially when drinking—to feel it was in the company of a wise man. Since he was more available to the locals than Der Alte, he stood in as the resident expert. A farmer even walked over one Sunday afternoon to seek his advice on how to get started. Alois proceeded to overwhelm him with the details of feeding a hive through the winter.

This discourse allowed him to feel like the fine fellow he had once been before his retirement. "The trick," he told his visitor, "is to master the technique of your special feeder. Because you not only put in the liquid nourishment, and cover the mouth of the jar, as I just told you, with the fine mesh, but you must have a small pump built into the bottle as well to create a vacuum since you will next be holding the vessel upside-down over the bung hole above the brood that is waiting to be fed. Do you follow?" Alois could see that he didn't. Before long, this Sunday visitor, thoroughly disheartened, said goodbye—he was not likely to be competition next winter.

My agents kept providing me with these petty episodes, but I was growing testy. They were missing the depth of Alois' new anxieties. So

soon as his visitor left, Alois felt so alone with his project that he began to wonder whether disease might strike the colonies.

He spent an evening reading his books but the anxieties remained. He had dreams of living in one of his boxes, himself a bee, no more than part of a cluster living in deepest and darkest obscurity. How could these bees guide themselves in that world, so stygian, so bereft of light?

By the end, Alois had raised this dream to the level of a nightmare—now I could feel more interest in what my agents were transmitting. Alois' hive multiplied in the darkness, then escaped from the box and flew away, far away. They could not be found.

When spring came, would he lose his hive? In the dark, he felt for Klara, and his hand came across her belly. She was so big now, yet the new one wasn't due until January. Would he be a giant of a fellow?

She came awake with his hand on her, and would have nestled into the embrace of his arm, but in the middle of this darkness, he felt a need to discuss a worrisome matter. She was soon wide awake and unhappy.

"I hope," Alois said, "that you haven't spoken to Herr Rostenmeier."

She knew immediately what was coming next. Herr Rostenmeier was the owner of the country store in Fischlham where once a week, on Saturday, she and Angela would buy a few foodstuffs they did not raise in their garden. Klara liked Mr. Rostenmeier, and had begun to talk to him about the future sale of their honey. Alois had told her not to make any deals, not yet, because the possibility was still there that he would do business with Der Alte. So, she had taken pleasure in the thought that maybe it would yet be Herr Rostenmeier, and in that case she could be the person in-between, and bring a little money back to the house from the local sales. Her fingers tingled each time she thought of such a transaction.

But now Alois would go to Der Alte. She knew it. "I thought," she said in the darkness, even as he patted her belly, "that you didn't like that man at all, yes, I remember you said you would have to smell him."

"He will be good to consult," Alois said shortly. The tendrils of the nightmare were still with him.

"Yes, yes," said Klara, "but you told me you don't trust Der Alte. Yes?" She was close to becoming hysterical. To be torn out of an agreeable

sleep for this! "Yes, you say you don't trust him, and yet you are still ready to choose this Der Alte over an honest man like Herr Rostenmeier?"

"Klara, this is all because you feel embarrassed," he told her. "Maybe you had a little too much conversation with Herr Rostenmeier already. Something you haven't mentioned, could it be? A real commitment. Without speaking to me first."

"No," she said, "not at all. I am not embarrassed. I made no commitment." She was tempted to add, "But this I will say, I must say, I will never understand the thinking that goes on in a person like you." However, she knew better. She was silent. He would have ridiculed her for such a stupid remark. She would have been up half the night explaining those few words, "A person like you."

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No surprise. Alois went back to Der Alte after all. He was a realist, he told himself, and so he was used to bad odors. After all, one had to deal now and again with the devil. (My devils snickered as they told me this.)

Alois paid his visit on the next Sunday and, once again, took Adi with him. This time the boy paid attention to the route. It was but a mile away and so he knew he would be able to find the hut again by remembering the forks of the path. All the while, he was filled with uneasy excitement. A woe as large as a loaf of bread had settled in his stomach, but perched above such heaviness, his heart felt most alive. He knew he would not tell his

father that he planned to visit Der Alte on another day and very much on his own.

"Yes," he kept saying to himself, "I will not be afraid to walk there.

In the night, maybe yes. There are too many spirits in the woods then."

For Adi, the second meeting between Der Alte and his father turned out even better than the first. If, at the start, they spoke about the marketing of honey and Adi could hardly follow that, it all became interesting once business was done. That was when the old man could not stop talking about the ongoing mysteries of bees. "Yes," said Der Alte in a most resonant voice, "I never weary of contemplating these tiny creatures with their immortal honey and their near to immortal sting. There are such subtleties to their keeping."

A rich discourse ensued. If Alois was hardly able to speak, he was nonetheless not too displeased for he would use it tomorrow night at Fischlham. A gift for the dolts! Adi, in turn, listened with care. The words he could not understand lived in his mind with their sounds.

"Can we," asked Der Alte, "ever pay enough attention to this work of Creation itself? It is so full of genius. These little devils come to us from

the Good Lord's divine and curious aesthetic—nature's wisdom expressing itself in this most bizarre form. We are given a hint of God's secret rites."

Der Alte went on. He could go on! References to God's ballet, God's gymnastics, God's investiture in wonder and awe. Der Alte was like many of our clients. We encourage them to praise God. In the highest. Always.

For that matter, he went on for so long that Alois was, once more, repelled. Too much time had elapsed without exercise of his own voice. Moreover, he did not like the look in his son's eye. Those blue eyes, so similar to Klara's, large and alive. There was reverence in them now.

Alois managed finally to interject a word.

"Why don't you take us into the other room, and show the boy your viewing box?"

It was obvious that Der Alte would prefer not to—even as Alois had expected—but Adi spoke up. "Oh, please, sir," he cried out, "I have never seen the inside of a bees' home. They have been with us back at the house for so long—" he tried to count quickly—"for seven, no, I think it is eight

weeks, and I have not seen even one of them. Must I wait until summer? Please."

"Spring," said Der Alte. "It is necessary to wait until spring." But then he shrugged. "All right," he said, "but you must be prepared. It is winter. Bees are sluggish during these months."

Indeed, they were. In the kitchen, bare but for a small stove, a sink, a hand-pump above the sink, and a pail beneath for the run-off, was also a table. At one end had been placed a narrow glass box, perhaps two feet long and one foot high, its interior concealed on both sides by black curtains. Once drawn back, two glass walls, not three inches apart, held one vertical frame in the space between, and it was filled with a mosaic of small wax cells, an uncountable number of them.

Adi was disappointed. A cluster of pullulating things, no larger than dark pills in a bottle, kept climbing over each other, startled by the light, a poor gang, crammed, jam-packed, an assembly of what looked to be squashy little creatures about as ugly as roaches. (Their wings were folded.) Adi had not been so disappointed since he had first seen Edmund's homuncular face squeezed up on Klara's breast.

Now, these bees could just as well have been beans bumping around in a heated pot, except, no, beans did not look so nervous. What an awful way to live! They miss the sun, the boy thought, and flying in the garden. Now they were just shoved up against each other. He sighed in preference to bursting into tears. Could these bees breathe?

"At this moment," said Der Alte, "they are the poorest of the poor, no better than sodden creatures in a slime of their own making. Yet their lives will yet span the extremities of existence. Now, they do nothing, but in summer, you will see them dance in the air, as wonderful as drops of dew in early morning light. So fearless. How they will strut as they enter into the golden petals of the flower-blooms that are waiting for them."

"Hear, hear," said Alois. No matter the drear aspects, Der Alte did have a manner. Give that much to the stink-pot.

And Adi was thinking, "these bees can sting you and then you are dead." He shivered in the old man's kitchen before the incomprehensibility of dying. Yet, right in the midst of this chill, he felt as close to the old man as to his father, for he could listen all day and all night to the wonderful words that came forth.

"Come and visit me," the old man managed to whisper before Alois gave the signal to leave.

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I do not know how powerful an influence this last murmured message could have had on Adi, but I will say that at no moment up to this point did I feel more regret at being obliged to rely on my Hafeld agents. Not long after (on Christmas Eve, no less!) when the rest of the house was asleep, Adi got up from bed, bundled himself into his warmest clothing, and went out to sit on the bench under the oak tree where the two Langstroth boxes had been placed. There he remained for a considerable time, growing colder by the minute. Yet, he stayed, and having placed himself between these two boxes, he kept embracing the back of each. He was praying for the continued life of the bees.

This was of signal interest to me. I queried my agents more than once about what they could glean from the boy's thoughts, and some of it seemed of value. That night, Adi had heard his father complain that the screen protecting the hive entrance had been torn. The entrance was small, but all the same, a mouse might have come into the hive. Alois soon decided that this was unlikely—the hole was simply not large enough—but Adi was not convinced. Since his father had repaired the screen that afternoon, Adi no longer knew as he sat between the boxes which one might be occupied by the mouse. Ergo, he set a hand on each.

What with it being Christmas Eve, the boy was full of his mother's spirit of celebration. "On this night, one thousand, eight hundred and ninety-five years ago," said Klara, "the Son of God was born, and he was the nicest human being ever to walk on earth. The loveliest, the sweetest. If you love Him, He will love you."

Adi was certain. This was one night when you could feel free to breathe the night air, no matter how cold. For the Son of God was present. Would He grant the power Adi needed to kill the mouse by the force of his thoughts?

To kill the mouse by the force of his thoughts? I knew the limitations of my agents. They could not have conceived of such a notion. This had come from Adi. It was his. His alone. If I had been present, I would have increased the stakes. I might have gotten the boy ready to believe that he could save certain lives by exercising the special power he possessed to destroy others. That is one of the most useful suppositions we can implant in clients, but it does call for a sequence of dream-etchings.

Since I was not present, I did my best not to brood over the lost opportunity. There was more than enough to occupy me in St. Petersburg. In company with my assistants, I was facing considerable opposition to my activities. I had never encountered a group of Cudgels as determined as this Russian crew. Nor as brutal. Over the last few centuries, these Russian angels had developed a powerful ability to contest the many demons we had installed within Russian Orthodox churches and monasteries. In consequence, these Cudgels—fully as rough as the meanest Russian monks—were in command of considerable zeal. During these months, they were wholly ready to defend the Coronation of the young Tsar-to-be, Nicholas the Second.

When the Maestro consulted me—as would occur now and again, I was bold enough to tell him that I did not like our chances of disrupting the Coronation itself. Too much would be arrayed against us. Whereas once the Coronation had taken place, it should not be difficult to create a powerful disorder a few days after the event.

I had dared to speak my mind, but then, the Maestro does not look kindly upon a lack of opinion among his close subordinates. "Allow me to muse upon the perceptions that some of you are able to offer. That is signally more useful to me than silence. I do not wish the fear of being wrong to leave you mentally inactive."

Enough. It is easy to see that these Russian matters were temporarily, at least, of more concern to me than the small events of Hafeld.

All the same, whether I was interested or not, Klara gave birth on January 21 to the new infant. For Alois, minimal joy. The much-anticipated strongman of the future had not arrived. A little girl was in the maternal bed. Now, all the ruckus of baby-feeding at night and baby yowling in the day, would go for naught. He had been counting on a powerhouse of a son to sweeten his old age, yes, offer an improvement over

the three boys he could not, at present, boast about, the wild one, the mamma's boy, and a crybaby snot. So, Alois was unready to celebrate the new birth, but he did—at the tavern in Fischlham night after night for quite a few nights—although the beer began to smell as sour as infant spew. There were now six human beings in his home. Come the end of spring, when Junior returned from Spital, he would be one of seven. The louder the tumult of voices in the bar, the more he was ready to compare it to the noise there would be at home.

My agent gained nothing from his visit to the tavern. Let men drink in a crowded room and solidarity rises among them. They soar on zephyrs of grain spirit, a brotherly defiance against the inroads of angels and demons, a certainty that as men, they are at this moment equal to all nearby forces.

These are not good conditions for our work. Openings, however, do present themselves, particularly when the drinkers are staggering home. We are ready then. Sometimes, disgusted at the hours lost, we even slam them to the ground. They usually take it personally, their lament most characteristic. "Somebody shoved me," they often cry out. Nobody

believes them, but they know better. Wrath had struck between the shoulder blades, and it was not their own rage, not at all.

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On his return, Alois may have been staggering now and again, but he was also feeling too alive to enter his house. Instead, he sat by the hive-boxes and fished out a rubber tube he had been keeping in his pocket. Next, he placed one end of it against a wall of the Langstroth and thereby was able to listen to the thrumming of the tenement dwellers in his little city. A fine sound was there for his ears, almost a tune, rich with little swells of contentment. But then, why should they not be content? Come morning, hundreds, then thousands of his bees, would be in a cluster awaiting their turn to suck on the mesh cloth of the wide-mouthed jar for their honey-and-water. So, in this dark and nicely drunken hour, separate thoughts passed

through Alois like horses on file, one large thought at a time. He tried to count how many bees might be inhabiting the box. No matter how drunk, he could still make an intelligent guess. Call it 20,000. That was bound to be the answer. Despite himself, knowing he should not really disturb the hive, he knocked on the side anyway. Because then, through the tube, he could listen to the shift in sound. Were they issuing alerts? The calls had gone up in pitch. Like the strings of a crazy violin. Then, quiet again. Soft. Like cats who sheathe their claws. Purring while asleep.

He roused himself long enough to go into the house and get his shirt off and his pants. Then he fell into bed. But he was still hearing the chorus. Strange sounds. His breath lifted over a small hesitation and down he went into slumber. He had one final thought as splendid as a fine horse on parade—it was that he certainly enjoyed these hymns of the bees a good deal more than the caterwauling of an infant.

His dreams, however, were not good. He had entered a large and cavernous interior where, to his lack of surprise, he found himself among his bees. It was not agreeable. They were defecating, and there he was, one of many, suffering just like his brother-creatures—no, sister-creatures—

wasting away in the contractions of a severe bowel disease, all of them defecating into the narrow aisles of the Langstroth box—what a filthy vision.

He looked to rouse himself. Because this was a dream. Healthy bees did not defecate in their own habitat (except perhaps for the worst and laziest of the drones) no, he had listened to the bees in one hive, and their sound was honorable. They would wait until the weather was warm enough to go outdoors.

But now he was awake, and painfully aware of all the excrement that had been accumulating in his colonies all these months. How could the little buggers hold it in?

It was warm next morning, the first warm morning of a February thaw, and as Alois came out of the house, his horde was everywhere above, hundreds of them, thousands—who could count? They were leaving their droppings all over the place, fifty and then more than a hundred feet away. It smelled like ripe bananas, and the snow was a field of white dotted with yellow spots. Innumerable yellow spots out there in a big circle around the hive bench. Buttercups in the snow! Hanging on a clothesline, Klara's

laundry had also become polka-dotted. Paula's diapers were spotted. An immense shower of defecation. Alois stepped it off. Yes, you could even find these yellow spots one hundred paces away from the hive boxes.

Klara was as furious as she dared to be. "You never told me to be careful," she said to her husband.

"It is too bad," he said, "that you will have all this laundry to do again. But how can one apologize? It is, after all, an act we have received from that good God you are so sure is yours." She walked away. A half hour later, water churning in two huge pots, she took the soiled garments off the line and set out to boil them again.

Alois was not about to tell himself that he felt sorry. Rather, he was happy for the bees. What delight they had shown while they flew about. Since it was a Saturday, Adi was nearby in the meadows and Alois, on impulse, decided to call him over. Let him hear some real talk.

"Everybody shits," he told the boy. "Everything shits, all things living. That is as it should be. What you keep in mind is that you learn how to get rid of shit or it will shit on you. Understand? You keep yourself clean, do you hear? Look at these bees. They are wonderful. They hold it

in all winter. They are determined not to dirty the hive. We can do the same. We are good people. Where we live is where we keep everything spotless."

"But, my father," said little Adolf, "what about Edmund?"

"What about him?"

"He still does it in his pants."

"That is your mother's concern, not yours."

Later in the day, Adi remembered the time when Alois-Junior, had stuck a dab of excrement right onto his nose, and even the recollection of it now brought forth the oddest cry from Adi's throat, so humiliated, so full of glee. Nor could Adi get over his excitement at the cleansing flight. Those bees had been so happy. They were dancing in the wind. That was because there had been so much caca in them, and now they were light. They were free. He couldn't help it. He couldn't stop his giggles. It had all made his mother so angry.

Now he remembered what Angela had whispered to him one morning. "Your mother has a saying," she said. 'Kinder, Kuche, Kirche.'" He nodded. He had heard it already. He yawned in her face.

"Oh, you think you know it all already," Angela said, "but you don't. There is a secret word as well. I was told the word."

"By who? By my mother?"

"I can't say. I have to keep this secret. It is a secret word."

"Who told you?"

She could see he was ready to burst into a tantrum. "All right. I will let you know," she said. "I heard it, yes, from your mother, your dear mother who loves me even if I am not hers."

"Tell me or I will yell and she will hear."

"That is you. That is just as mean as you." She held him by the ear.

"Remember," she said, "she told me in secret that the real saying is, 'Kinder, Kucher, Kirche und. . .'" she started to giggle. "und Kacke!"

Now, he was giggling as well. Oh, those bees, worse than babies. He had a crazy picture of every bee with a diaper, the tiniest diaper. He was laughing so hard that he felt like urinating, and that made him think of Der Alte who came into his thoughts so often, especially when he had to urinate.

Now, Adi realized that he would like to visit Der Alte, yes, he wanted to, so much.

Next day, Sunday, was warm again, and once more the bees were out. After Klara left for church and Alois dozed, Adi started to run up and down the meadow, as if to use up the impulse to visit the old man, but in his mind he kept seeing each fork in the forest road, and so he knew he could find the hut. This was so much more than an impulse. The desire to make such a trip by himself was as sure as if a rope had begun to tug on him.

He went. And Der Alte, prepared for the visit (by the same message, for certain, that Adi had received) was there once again at the door, but the tablespoon of honey was not yet in his hand, no, for that, Adi now had to sit on his lap. "Yes, you are such a good boy," Der Alte said, "I can love you like a grandson, and you will never need to be afraid of me. Yes, you are so nice and strong." Der Alte laid a hand upon the boy's thigh, but with only the lightest touch, even as he fed Adi the honey.

The boy was not afraid, or, yet, perhaps a little. In school, they had fairy tales to read, and sometimes there were ogres in the forest and evil spirits could change little children into birds or pigs or goats. However, it did not feel so risky sitting on the legs of Der Alte. It was better than his

father's lap. He never knew when his father would blow pipe smoke into his face. No, Der Alte was a nicer man.

And indeed, they sat there long after Adi had tasted all of the spoonful of honey and felt happy with Der Alte's old hand resting on his knee.

After a considerable part of an hour has passed, he began, however, to feel less comfortable. Would his father begin to wonder where he was? Yet, when he stirred, Der Alte said a few words which aroused the same sense of surprise as turning a page in a book and right there before you is a nice picture.

"Do not tell this to anyone," said Der Alte, "but I am trying to make one little bee very happy. I have asked this bee to live by itself close by me. I will tell you. I keep it in the kitchen."

"Does it try to talk?"

"It can make sounds. For certain!" Der Alte smiled. "But no, dear boy, I do not try to encourage this little bee to speak our language. That is certainly too much to ask. I just try to make her happy. Which is not so

easy. Because now that I have selected her, she must live alone in a small queen box I use for her even if she is not a queen."

"My father says that bees live only for other bees. They are—" he searched to remember the expression—"they are dedicated to the community."

"Your father is correct. Yes. Bees live in a hive. They do not seek to live alone."

"Even if they are fed good things all the time?"

"You are the smartest boy I know. You are full of understanding. I did want to see what would happen if I were to select one bee and keep her warm and most well-fed, and think about her all the time with all the good feeling that is in my heart. So, when I go into the other room, I take care to speak to her. That is twenty times a day. She cannot comprehend what I am saying. But I want her to know that I am thinking of her. Sometimes I even take her out of the Queen box."

"Doesn't she fly away?"

"Oh, no. I prevent such a possibility." He touched the boy's head tenderly. "When I remove it from its little box, it jumps around, it is so merry, but it knows it must not try to fly."

"Does it have no wings?"

There was a pause. "No longer does it have wings."

Adi knew. No need to ask. Such a mix of good feelings and bad. His happiest feelings were trying to lift themselves above the bad ones. He asked now to look at the bee in the little box.

It was so little and so frisky and it jumped about in excitement when Der Alte let it out of the box. Indeed, it hopped onto the tip of the old man's finger which had been dipped into honey.

"I do not know how much more will happen," said Der Alte. "What I am attempting is difficult. I see little chance for success. But how wonderful if I can brighten the feelings of this little creature. After all, before my intervention, she was insignificant. Can I lift her now to a level her sisters cannot attain? I feel for her. She is so lonely. She misses the horde. She is loneliness itself. But I am ready to try to bring the sweetness

of relief. That can come only when terrible loneliness is replaced by well-being. Yes," he said, nodding his head most profoundly.

"Oh," said Adi, "I hope you are able to do that. It is so sad to be lonely. Sometimes I, too, am lonely. So, I know. But I feel afraid for this bee. Will it die?"

"Sooner or later, it must. It will. But I would like to see if I can make her happy for a little while."

"Yes," said Adi, "I understand. You love this one."

"Maybe," said Der Alte. He sighed. "Next time you visit, we will see if I have made progress."

Is Der Alte entering his senility? No! This outlandish pursuit of "well-being" for one isolated bee, an obviously stupid procedure—particularly after it has lost its wings is not without purpose. For the Maestro, that is. The oddest experiments reveal much to us. Freaks can be a fount of information.

I will say one outcome became clear. Our wingless embodiment of loneliness died before Adi saw her again. What is also to the point: Der Alte and Adi had tears in their eyes on the boy's next visit and were closer

than ever. Count on it. Der Alte had decorated a small matchbox to serve as a coffin for the bee, and the old man and the boy then laid it into the earth under a spoonful of dirt.

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Early in March, a week arrived that brought the sun to Hafeld every day. The hives began to stir, and the hardiest of the winter bees came out to forage. It was likely that the queen was now laying eggs out of her well-kept store of old fornications consummated high in the air last summer. Now, one hive began to weigh more each morning. That worried Alois. The other should be doing as well.

He decided to open the top of each Langstroth box and look in. Whereupon, he discovered exactly what he had been fearing. The two colonies might have sat on the same bench through the winter, but that seemed to be all they shared. One was thriving, the other could not be

termed healthy. While a few dead bees lay on the lowest platform of the good box, a tumble of miniscule carcasses was on the floor of the other.

Of late, just before the warm spell, Alois, by way of the rubber tube, had heard a great deal of restless humming in this second colony. It worried him. Now, open to examination, fecal droppings were visible near the hive entrance, and many of the brood combs were empty. Had the queen died? He did not really know how to locate the lady—she was, after all, only a bit larger than her own worker-bees, smaller, indeed, than the drones.

He would have been dispirited, but his acumen had also been confirmed. He had not worried for too little. It looked like one or another killer disease.

So Alois decided that the remaining bees of this colony had to be gassed. He was ready to call on Der Alte for assistance but decided that he would not. His winter-long worries had engendered their own kind of fortitude.

He chose a Saturday. Adi and Angela, home from school, were his assistants, and the process was not difficult. He took a small cake of sulphur, part of the equipment he had purchased five months ago, lit it, and

left it to smoke on the floor of the bad hive. The entrance was plugged, the hive lid at the top was laid on again, and the gas did the job, and quickly enough. When Angela began to weep over the death of the poor bees, Alois sent her inside. But Adi watched, sitting beside Alois on an adjoining bench, his eyes alive in response to his father's lecture. "In nature," said Alois, "there is no mercy for the weak. Your big sister is silly. To become so upset!"

"I am not bothered," said Adi.

"Good," said Alois. "Now, let us go and empty this box and clean the combs."

Adi found himself thinking of Der Alte's one lonesome bee, now dead, and that did bring tears to his eyes.

But, of course, there was no comparison. He blinked back those tears. It was clear to Adi: Der Alte had loved one little bee, but the sick ones here in this bad hive dirtied the place where they ate and where they slept. No comparison.

That night, by way of a suggestion from the Maestro, I prepared a small dream-etching, simple enough to be installed by the best of my local

Hafeld agents. It was a repetitive dream in which his father asked Adi to count each and every one of the dead bees. To make sure of the number, Adi was told to lay them out in rows, one hundred to each row—a tedious dream to be certain, and in the morning, he was almost late in leaving for school, since it took many minutes to awake. All the same, he was proud of the high number he had managed to count in the dream. There had been at least forty rows of one hundred bees, all laid out on an immaculate white cloth. He had not realized until now that he could count to four thousand. No one else in his class would come near. His only regret was that he had not finished his dream. There had been many more mounds of dead bees to count.

Here, I would warn the reader not to make too much of the gassing nor the body count. It is not to be understood as the unique cause of all that came later. For a dream-etching, no matter how artful, leaves but a dot upon your psyche, a footprint to anticipate a future sequence of developments that may or may not come to pass some decades later. Most dream-etchings are not unlike the abandoned foundations one can see on the outskirts of Third

World cities. Left to molder for lack of further funds, they lie there, excavations on a scraggly field.

It would be a gross mistake, then, to assume that this dream-etching determined all that was to follow. I assure you we would be the first to applaud if matters were that simple.

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The good hive was another matter. It was thriving. The weight of the colony increased each week, and the honey comb began to fill up. From his books, Alois had learned that each of these miniscule cells was capped by wax by the worker bees only when the water content in the honey had been reduced to less than 20%. To blow off such surface water, the hive had to fan their wings for hours every day. Alois felt intoxicated all over again by the dedication of his newborn creatures to such never-ceasing chores. To sweeten his mood, the first honey was also ready, and now his bees were capping the cells—just as they were supposed to!

Out in his white garments with the big box-like white veil over his head, protected by his gloves, Alois began to feel as if he was acquiring a bit of real technique. It was, after all, not so simple to pull combs out for examination, then slide them back again. He certainly didn't want to be such a lummock as to squash his Queen if she happened to be moving around in the area. Indeed, the confidence he gained from these results took him over to Der Alte's hut long enough to purchase a new Queen to replace the lady who had been gassed in the other Langstroth box.

Der Alte even gave him a lesson on how to spot the present Queen. It was not too difficult when she was laying her eggs into empty cells, for she would be followed by a retinue who hovered over each deposited egg long enough to discharge their own enzymes onto the larva. "Magical fortifiers," Der Alte was quick to say.

Alois had to submit to the lecture but he returned with not one but two new queens, (both impregnated in the past year). One would establish a colony for the box that had been fumigated, and the other was to be installed in the one Alois had built himself last Fall. Some of his combs of new brood together with combs of new honey would now be transferred to

the two empty boxes. All three would now be partially filled, and that was also to the good. Each colony could now build wax cells for their new brood and storage cells for their new honey. If he had lost one colony to gassing, he would soon be able to consider himself the master of three, all flourishing—could that be? Of course, he had had to lay out good money to be able to speak of such success.

All the same, he began to feel a cautious optimism. This spring might yet prove good to him. April had come. Flowers were sprouting, the walnut trees, the oaks, the plum trees, the beeches and cherry trees, the maples and apple trees were in bloom. There would be a host of flowers in the meadow.

He liked to sit by his hive boxes with Adi beside him, the boy carefully covered and veiled in an outfit Klara had put together. Father and son now delighted in keeping watch at the entrance to each hive where guard bees stayed on post. Every last bee who came back with pollen and honey was carefully sniffed by one of the guards before she could enter. On occasion, Adi would begin to hoot because the guard would drive a visitor away, especially if it carried no honey. "Look, Father," he would say, "she doesn't smell right."

Yet, with all these incoming riches, Alois still kept serving food to the colonies. "Now we feed them honey," Alois told the boy, "so they will make even more honey." Five trays had already filled with combs in each of the three hives. And three queens were working in three separate hive boxes to deposit their eggs in cells, and the foragers were flying missions from morning to dark. Each forager would return with its load every few minutes, and then was out again. Alois had read that it took forty thousand such voyages to accumulate two pounds of honey.

Sometimes he would look at the old bees who had lived through the winter in the good box. They were easy to notice. They were battered relics with frayed wings, worn-out from over-use. The hair was gone from their bodies. Still ready to forage at the beginning of this season, but now, undeniably, they were expiring. Each morning a team of new-born worker bees would collect whichever bodies had fallen to the ground floor of the box and sweep them from the guards' entrance, then off the ramp. Alois could hardly mourn their passing. Young stock was taking their place. He felt as if he had finally begun his venture into apiculture. The new bees would be his, not Der Alte's. He did not dwell on the fact that all three of

his queens had been fertilized a year ago, and so, in that sense, were Der Alte's children.

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Given a splendid morning in May, with a host from each of the three colonies in the air, Alois began to notice a pattern in the movement of one bee. This scout—or whoever she was—kept making figure-eights in the air.

"She is signaling to the others," Alois said to himself. "She is trying to show them something."

He was right in this observation, he knew it, because a good number of other bees had joined the first, and off they flew toward the head of the meadow. On the other side of that rise, as Alois soon discovered on his walk, wildflowers had sprouted overnight. The bee he had observed was indeed a scout.

An old lust came back then. If there was one thing Alois had always wanted from life even more than a new woman, it was to be the discoverer of a new concept, something so startling and so valuable that his name might even be honored across time.

The desire still resided in him. It gave him considerable happiness to think that he had just discovered a new concept here, and now, by his eyes alone! He had seen what he would call a signal-dance. One bee was looking to bring others to a place where flowers full of nectar were waiting. Bridesmaids, you could say, all lined up to be deflowered by the wedding ushers. But these hard-working foragers could not be called ushers. They were girlies, making love to flower-girlies. A joke, but his own joke, and he enjoyed it. In none of the books he had read so far had he seen any mention of this little dance, this wig-wag in the sky. He was twice afraid to mention it to Der Alte, once—because for all he knew—it might be already an established concept among apicultural cognescenti, or, to the contrary, if brand new, might not Der Alte know better than himself just where to publish the observation?

Alois did permit himself to entertain the hope that Alois-Junior might yet use his intelligence to work well for his father's ideas. Yes, let the son become as worthy as the father! How much Franz Josef had wanted that. Sorrow came to Alois at the thought of the Emperor's pain in the hour he learned that Rudolph, his own Crown Prince, had died at Mayerling after perpetrating a murder and suicide, or double suicide—whatever it had been?—with his young mistress. What a blow for the good man, the Emperor-father. And tragedy for Sisi, the beautiful Empress. How she must have loved her son Rudolph.

These sad thoughts had a curious effect. They left Alois feeling so full of enterprise that he decided to visit Der Alte and ingest a little instruction on how to locate the Queen bees.

Der Alte was certainly skillful—it had to be said. He opened one of his hives, scanned the racks, located the Queen, reached in with a bare hand, and grasped her wings carefully and most delicately between thumb and forefinger. "In a few years," he said, "you, too, will be employing this approach to capture, but for now, I will show you a safer method." Of course, he proceeded then to discourse on all the methods and modes of

discerning just where the queen might be, whether depositing eggs, or fertilizing them one after another in their new cells, or, sometimes, resting in her court.

"Once located, it is simple," said Der Alte, "to capture our Lady."

"This, as I understand," said Alois, "will be most necessary when I look to collect my honey."

"Exactly," said Der Alte. "That is a time when you are moving many frames, and scraping the wax covering away from the honey cells. A careless move can crush the queen. So,"—to Alois' annoyance, Der Alte wagged a finger at him—"so," he repeated, "we do not go first for the honey, no, we locate the Queen like the good fellows we are, and then we use this queen-catcher, this glass." He took up a glass tube with a flat concave dome at one end. "This is what you lay over the queen," he said, "and then you slip a little queen-cage"—he held up just such a small flat container, two inches long—"underneath and blow the queen right into the cage, punkt! Now she is safe. She can stay in the cage until the honey has been removed."

We can be certain that Alois practiced catching the queen. Indeed, he spent an afternoon apprehending and releasing each of his three beauties, finding them, putting the flat dome-like end of the tube most carefully over one or another, and then blowing her right into the little queen-cage.

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Alois' fine spirits waned with the loss of warm weather. A cold spell arrived, cruel to the expectation aroused by early spring. Alois now girded himself for all his gains to be lost by this out-of-season chill upon the earth.

An old axiom returned to him. Johann Nepomuk used to say, "Spring is the season that will betray you most"

So there were days when he came close to exhausting himself through the to-and-fro of removing tar-paper from the top of each hive, only to put it back again if the light at high noon might go dim in the sky, so abrupt was the movement of the clouds. Soon after, he had to run back to strip the tarpaper away for the sun was out again and the day had returned to warmth.

During one near-freezing cold spell, he caught a cold. That offered a collateral worry. Was it impossible that one of his Queens might also catch a cold? In sympathy with the overlord? He scolded himself. Such nonsense!

Then it occurred to Alois that this return of his fears might not be so silly. What if it were a reflection of how he felt about the condition of his true health? Was he coming nearer to his end? It was the worst thought to have. His imagination now entered a matter he had never allowed himself to approach. All through the years, so far as he could remember, death had not seemed threatening to him. A dull end to a good life, maybe, but nothing to do with hell.

Now, however, one damn question was following another. What if death was not as he had assumed? He had been certain that religion was there for a very good practical reason. It couldn't be simpler—you had to keep the weak and unruly in order. But a man of pride (such as himself) could do as he chose.

Now, he was feeling panic of a new sort. His heart took a leap at the thought, one fearful leap as if his chest had been pummeled. Could guilt be real?

Poor Alois. He was now there for the taking. No Cudgel would bother to protect him. I could have the tried-and-true pleasure of appearing to him in a dream. I would offer an impersonation of a guardian angel. I did not even have to be present. It might be easy enough for the best of my three agents to bring it off.

But to what end? Would Alois be worth the maintenance?

The sober fact, which we do well not to ignore, is that people of Alois' age are rarely a prize. Their utility is limited. They are too fixed in their nature to warrant much molding, whereas flexibility is what we look for in exciting new clients. Their aims must be redirected with ours.

On those special occasions when we do choose a man or woman over fifty, we look for a serviceable warp in them that we can employ for a specific purpose. Repetitive irritations are one example. A mean old lady who keeps asking everyone whether they want something to eat when she

knows that they don't, can unhinge a good family. They grow uneasy at their increasing desire to smother her with the nearest pillow.

Alois, however, was too average a human product. There was little need to pick him up now. Milk runs would be enough. Let my agents hover just above his dreams.

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Early in May, the weather turned warm again, and many of Alois' woes eased. In part he had already recovered some of his good spirits by cleaning and oiling the tools he had bought in the fall from Der Alte, and this chore he performed in much the manner of a good soldier who takes his rifle apart in order to oil it and put it back together again.

My Hafeld agents, having little to report, filled their latest communications with lists of his tools and did this so assiduously that I grew irked at their enumerations of pollen feeders, hatching cages, bee-smokers, a water sprayer, a mating box (whatever that was!) a hive-tool, even a honey-stirrer made by Alois himself out of beech-wood. And then

there was a spur-wheel embedder for preparing the foundation of the insertable frames, as well as a capping fork—a slew of details which provided no interest for me.

Klara, in contrast, knew how to make better use of spring in Hafeld. She was not always counting how many of the brood nests were filled with new pupae, nor was she worrying about the temperature within the hives. Now that it had turned warm on a second wave of sun and undulant air, she was ready to loosen some of the knots that had coagulated in her limbs that winter. "God, too, is taking His rest," she said to herself even as she drew in a breath of air through the open window of her kitchen, and then, on impulse, with much left to do in the house, she picked up Paula, four months old, and went out into the meadow. The loveliest of silences prevailed, wholly without sound, no, rather it was a silence that took in the lightest caress of air, and she could even hear the swaying of the grass in the field, and all but hear the curtsies of the flowers. It was as if the sum of these tender sensations was there to contain the silence of these hills. "Listen to how quiet it is," she said to Paula, "listen, little angel, and you will hear the flowers whisper." And, indeed, it seemed to her as if the

nearest ones had heard what she said, for indeed they began to incline toward her, the most cheerful little daisies she had ever seen.

The breeze had not been enough to cause a stirring in these wildflowers. She knelt in the grass, the infant in her arms, and spoke to the daisies, "You are beautiful, all of you," she said, and, yes, there was no mistaking, these flowers were moving for her. They were doing a dance, the tiniest dance. "Yes, Paula," she said, "these flowers love you and love me because we like them so much. Is it not so, you little dears?" She was ready to vouch for this (although to whom?—certainly not Alois) that they had heard her, and indeed, they bowed delicately as if she had been waiting on them. "Yes, they are little princesses," she said to Paula, and had to laugh at herself for feeling—was this pure madness itself?—for feeling that the daisies were not only dear to her, but that she was dear to the daisies. "Oh, I am one big silly," she said aloud. But she could not help herself. She still believed that these white petals were listening. The balm of the air was like love, yes, exactly like the love she felt for the four-month-old in her arms. Klara's body was returning to her, or so it felt. The old poked-out, wounded, bruised and stupid body of all the winter months since Paula had

been born, now felt sweet with the beginnings of true repair. She told herself that it was Spring, and nature herself was enjoying a party. How could it be otherwise? Each breath was full of balm. God was near and He was in the air, her Good God, full of radiance. Yet, the air was at peace. Could it be that God was resting on His laurels? And so He deserved. He deserved so much. She wanted to pray to Him then, but did not know how since she did not wish to ask for anything at this moment, merely to praise Him for being so good, and that was better done in church. There, everyone else would be doing the same so it could be understood as humble, not vain, whereas here she was all alone with Paula and the flowers, and full of such happiness. For she was thinking of all the young boys and girls of her childhood and of those rare occasions when they would romp and play just like these sweet crazy bees flying around the house now and so happy to be out in the sun after living in a dungeon all through winter, crazy now with the joy that they could turn somersaults in the air, free of all duties, free of their tasks for a little while. Indeed, like Paula they were new to sunshine.

And Klara thought of the years to come when Paula would be ready to play, and that left her full of love for little Edmund who was so kind to

the baby, the only one of the children who was. Angela couldn't really care (although she was dutiful enough) and Adi was a worry—once she had seen him pinch Paula's cheek hard enough to make her cry. Klara had spanked him for that, one sharp slap across his little seat, but she wouldn't do it again in any kind of hurry. For who would think? He had glared back at her—the prince of princes, so strong a look that she had to use all the strength of her eyes to stare him down.

It was too beautiful a day to think of that moment of misery—so intense it had been—no, she would rather thank God for having given her so sweet a baby, a daughter who would yet grow up, so she knew, to be her own good sweet best friend. And she even said as much aloud to Paula. "May the angels hear me," she whispered to her child before she turned back to the house and her duties.