

BOOK V

THE FAMILY

By the time he was a year old, Clara called the boy Adi. It was never Adolf or David. (Adi was much too close to David.) "Look," she would say to her stepchildren, "look, Alois, look, Angela, isn't Adi an angel, a little angel, isn't it?" Since the baby had a round face, big round eyes as blue as hers, and a small mouth, and therefore looked to them like any other baby, they nodded with easy obedience. She was a good stepmother and that was all right with Alois Junior, and also with Angela, especially since they had been told by Alois Senior that their own mother, Fanni, had been crazy.

-1-

By the time he was a year old, Klara called the boy Adi. It was never Adolf or Dolfi. (Dolfi was much too close to Teufel.) "Look," she would say to her stepchildren, "look, Alois, look, Angela, isn't Adi an angel, a little angel, isn't it so?" Since the baby had a round face, big round eyes as blue as hers, and a small mouth, and therefore looked to them like any other baby, they nodded with easy obedience. She was a good stepmother and that was all right with Alois-Junior, and also with Angela, especially since they had been told by Alois-Senior that their own mother, Fanni, had been crazy.

Klara did not plan to speak with such open enthusiasm to her stepchildren about their new half-brother, but she could not help herself. The beatitude was in her eyes. Adi was giving every indication that he would still be there tomorrow.

Breast-feeding gave her some of this certainty. She was putting her own strength into him, her ready nipple never far from his mouth. Some of our minor devils, who passed over Braunau at night, would report that her prayers were more heartfelt than any other young mothers living nearby. Devils, obviously, have minimal attachment to the sentimental, let alone the heartfelt, but one or two were bothered. Klara's prayer was so pure: "Oh, Lord, take my life if it will help to save his." Other women, being more practical, complained to God about what was missing in their days. The most greedy were always looking to own a better house. The stupid were looking for a surprisingly good lover, "yes, if you permit it, Lord." There was rarely a sweet for which they did not pine. Klara's prayers, by contrast, yearned to give long life to the child.

While the Maestro was not often sympathetic to breast-feeding since its absence could stimulate ugly energies we could later employ, he was more

tolerant in cases of first-degree incest. Then he wanted the mother to be close indeed to the child. All the better for us! (A monster is most effective when it can call on mother-love with which to charm new acquaintances.)

Excretory dramas also offer advantages. A dirty butt on a baby can send a signal—the mother may be a potential client for us. The opposite is also of use. Klara proves a fine example here. She always kept a clean house. Her rooms at the Pommer Inn were now as spotless as any home tended by several good maids. The furnishings gleamed. So, too, did Adi's pip-squeak of an anus offer its glow. It was kept as immaculate as an opal, small and glistening, and of that, too, did I approve—an incestuary must always be kept aware of the importance of his or her excrement, even if it comes down to a little asshole that is forever being polished.

-2-

Not long after Adolf was born, Alois decided to leave the Pommer Inn. This move amounted to his twelfth change of address in Braunau over fourteen years. But, Alois had good words for the Pommer: "It has elegance. I don't know that I would use such a word for anything else in this little city." He had a dozen such remarks to enliven a hundred situations of small talk. "Women are like geese," he liked to say. "You can recognize them from behind." Heavy tavern laughter would follow even if none of them could explain what was so particular about the rear end of a goose. Or, when speaking to fellow professionals: "To pick out a smuggler is easy. Either they look like the wretches they are, or they are too good to be true. They dress too well, they

speak too well, and the amateurs always work very hard at looking you in the eye.”

When asked, however, why he had moved from the Pommer Inn after a residence that had lasted for four years, he would shrug. “I like a change,” he would say. The truth was that he had used up the waitresses, chambermaids and cooks at the Pommer who were not too old or too ugly, and he could have added (and did to one or two friends), “when a woman goes dry on you, change your house. That can put a little oil in her.”

On the day when the Hitler family left the Pommer Inn, he had, however, a most uncharacteristic thought. It was that fate could yet choose him for high position. I will remark that his idea of high position was to become Chief Customs Official for the provincial capital of Linz. Indeed, fate would yet give him exactly that post. Never superstitious (except when he was) Alois decided that the shift from the Pommer Inn to a rented house on Linzerstrasse was a good move. He and Klara both agreed that they needed more room, and now they had it. Of course, there were no females in the attic, but he could manage with that. He had nosed out a woman who lived on his route home from the tavern. He had to pay for the privilege by giving her a

gift time to time, but then the rent on Linzerstrasse was low. It was a dreary house.

All the while, he fought against falling in love with his wife. She infuriated him. If ants were like bees and had a Queen for whom they labored, then Klara was Queen of the ants, for she commanded his skin to crawl, his crotch to itch, and his heart to toll in his chest—all of this coming from no more than the presence of Klara on her half of the divided bed. He would keep thinking of how she had looked on the night of her wedding. She had worn a dark silk dress, rose-colored with a white collar—that much white she allowed herself as a bride—and on her white forehead, she had teased some charming curls. At her breast was pinned the one piece of jewelry she possessed, a small green cluster of glass grapes looking real enough to mislead a man into reaching for one. And then there were her eyes—no mistake! He had to fight against falling in love with a woman who kept the cleanest house in Braunau just for him and for three kids—two of them not even her own!—a woman always as polite to him in public as to an emperor, a woman who never complained about what she had and didn't have nor nagged him about finances, a woman who still had only one good dress, the one worn at her

wedding party, and yet if he laid a finger on her, she would have bitten it off. He wondered if the difference in their age was what it was about. Better than marrying her, he should have put her in a convent. Yet his skin itched at the thought of how she would not let him near.

Drinking at the tavern, he would look to regain some pride. His dislike of the Church had by now become a conversational grist. He could certainly say a few things. He would occasionally page through an anti-clerical volume he had found in an antique bookshop in Braunau; indeed, the store owner, Hans Lycidias Leipziger, would meet him on many an evening for beer. While the bookseller kept himself at a scholarly level above more mundane discussions by offering no more than a nod of his head from time to time, his wise presence, his shaven chin and shaven upper lip, his full mutton chops, his peephole spectacles, his half-bald head of burgeoning white hair, offered a slight but legitimizing resemblance to Arthur Schopenhauer and thus gave support to Herr Leipziger's smallest assent, just enough to carry the other Customs Officers around the more bruising turns of Alois' argument. While they were hardly to be counted as church-goers—"No good man wants to be neutered," most were ready to admit—still they were officials. So, they could

hardly feel at ease when a prestigious institution was mocked, let alone the Holy Roman Church.

Not Alois. He showed no fear in declaring that he had no fear. "If there is a Providence larger than Franz Josef's power to provide for us, I have not encountered it."

"Alois, not everything comes up to a man with a printed sign," said the officer closest to him in rank.

"Yes, it is all a mystery. Mystery, mystery, mystery, and the Church keeps the keys, they are our caretakers, yah?"

The others laughed uneasily. But Alois was thinking of Klara and how her piety left a hot rock in his stomach. He would grind this rock to powder. "In the Middle Ages," he said, "do you know? The whores, they were more respectable than the nuns. They even had a Guild. For themselves alone! I have read about a convent in Franconia so stinking bad the Pope had to investigate. Why? Because the Franconia Whores' Guild complained about the illegal competition they were receiving from the Franconia nuns."

"Come now," said two drinkers at once.

"True. It is true. Absolutely true. Herr Leipziger can show you the text." Leipziger nodded slowly, reflectively. He was a little too drunk to be certain on which side his authority should fall. "Yes," said Alois, "the Pope says, 'Send a monsignor to look into it.' I ask you: What does this good monsignor report? It is that half the nuns are pregnant. This is the sober fact. So, the Pope now takes a real look at his monasteries. Orgies. Orgies of homosexuals." He said it with such force that he had time to take a long swallow from his tankard.

"That, of course," said Alois, once fresh breath had also been ingested, "need not surprise us. To this day, half of the priesthood are mamma's boys. We know that."

"No, we don't," muttered one of the younger officers. "My brother is a priest."

"In that case, I tip my hat to him," said Alois, "if he is your brother, he is different. But that was then. And I assure you: The priests who were real men did worse. You ever hear this saying by the Pope? From the same Pope. He said, 'No priest needs to marry so long as the peasant has a wife.'"

The unspoken demand of his voice was that the junior officers be ready to applaud with laughter. So, they laughed. "It was exactly like that," he said. "The poor merchant has one wife, the priest has ten, and the Bishop cannot enter heaven—too many wives to bring along."

"Which Bishop?"

"The Bishop of Linz, don't you know?"

Alois had not forgotten the Bishop of Linz who, six years ago, had refused his application to marry Klara. He certainly recalled how in order to defray the expenses of translating his letter into Latin, he had been forced to declare himself a pauper. That still rankled.

On the walk home, his mood remained foul. He came to an unhappy conclusion: his tirades against the Church might have to cease. He was fifty-four years old, and for many years, had not worried about his position in life. He knew that he would rise in the ranks open to him, but no higher.

Now, however, a friend up in the Finance Watch, had told him that there was talk of a promotion for Alois Hitler up to Chief Customs Officer at Passau. Given his lack of formal education, this would be a true rise in rank. "However, you must now watch yourself, Alois," the friend from the Finance

Watch said. "All this is still a year away. Keep a good name if you want to be moved to Passau."

He had always seen himself as exceptional, afraid of no one (except for certain superiors in uniform), possessed of a genuine magnetism for women (how many men could say that much for themselves?) and up from the ranks. Moreover, he had never been timid about public opinion. Nobody he knew could say as much. In that department, he was no coward.

But now this respected friend (by way of his confidant in the upper councils of the Finance-Watch) was saying, "Watch out for the townspeople in Braunau."

This caution traveled into his digestion. Because Alois could not decide whether to trust his friend. The man was a practical joker. In fact, he was the same one who had once told him: "The townspeople of Braunau are nothing. You can put your thumb to your nose at them." Alois had indeed put together a good many habits around that remark, but the truth was he had certainly said too much tonight if there was any ground to the rumor concerning Passau. Of a sudden, he was learning how much ambition he had, a real ambition which

he had never admitted to himself. He couldn't. It would have been like a river breaking through a levee. But now, he had to stop pissing on the Church.

Yes, in this sense, his wife, a cold tit to him and a jug of warm milk to the baby—what a guzzler! never off the tit. But, get by all that—she was a useful wife. Good for the children, good cook, very good with the Church.

Now, he, personally, was not going to be caught at a High Mass except for State occasions, holidays. He did not wish to live with a new itching attack, no, he did not see the confessional box for himself. His skin prickled. A serious official of the Crown like himself should not have to bare his soul private stuff to a priest. Let them find nourishment elsewhere for their masturbation.

Women, however, should be seen in church. The people in Braunau must be able to say that his wife never missed a Mass.

-3-

In our ranks, we look upon ambition as a force that is generally at our disposal. We are ready to attach ourselves to any passion that veers out of control. Of no emotion is this more true than ambition. Yet it is also related to the Lord's purposes. By it's design, every living human is there to fulfill some part of His Vision.

Of course, such a supposition is a folly. As the Maestro is never loathe to tell us, a human who suffers from too much ambition is advertising the Creator's own lack of anticipation. The D.K., wishing His Vision to be innovative, had encouraged the human will to be free of Him. Once again, God had miscalculated. Ambition is not only the most powerful of the

emotions but the most unstable. Defeat can become intolerable. So, many of the most ambitious choose to blame God for a run of bad luck.

Large ambition, therefore, has to awaken our interest. The D.K., a prodigious optimist, had not foreseen that the men and women who intended by the intensity of their ambition to promulgate His Vision had better be saints. In contrast, the Maestro has always been alert to the lodes of perversity to be found in every vein of human nature.

Consider the case with Alois. Many people guard their ambition as the most sequestered part of their emotions (guarded even from their own awareness). For so soon as ambition begins to burn too brightly, it is ready, if necessary, to shred a good many long-held convictions about the inviolability of one's honor. Or one's loyalty to friends. All too often ambition becomes as blind a cutting tool as a laser.

No surprise then if Alois was not the only one in the Hitler family to suffer such a disruption. Ambition, being a true germ, is highly infectious. If Klara now had a child who was actually giving signs of staying alive, her breasts, in consequence, were suffused with joy, the most generous joy she had ever known. Klara now wanted everything for Adi. And to such a degree,

Before long, he and his troops were engaged in hour-long contests. There were endless alterations of the rules. The numbers increased to fifteen and twenty a side.

Word came from the E.O. "Enough for now. Let us see how much of this endures after the move."

That was not uncharacteristic of our Maestro. We had to be ready to accept quick changes. In this case, the situation of the family had altered. Alois was going to move Klara, Angela, Alois Junior, Adi, and the baby Edmund, up from Passau to dwell nearer to him in Linz.

While the war games are now done for a time, I feel the need to soothe any growing uneasiness in the reader. Good readers are an unprotected species—their allegiance moves in advance of their judgment. Some may have felt uncomfortable, therefore, to discover that they were enjoying these first successes of the child, Adolf Hitler. Be assured. To read about the skills or triumphs of any protagonist is bound to elicit happiness in just about all who follow the story, especially if there is a suggestion of the sentimental, or even better, the magical—useful tools for any author who wishes to arouse quick emotions in the reader. That is why so many popular writers come

“Sometimes I am afraid he is not very important to you,” she dared to say.

She had gone one step beyond where she had thought to go. Bad enough for him that he had only half a bed, but now she was looking to scold him? “Important to me?” he said. “That I can answer. He is not important to me. Not yet. I want to see if he will live.”

She did not weep often, but here she burst into tears. The worst had happened, and once again she felt weak before her husband. She was not free of loving him.

At that moment, the dog began to bark. Alois had bought a mongrel boxer for a few Kronen from a farmer he knew. Since they were living in a house, rather than at an inn, the purchase could be considered protection worth the cost. But the dog, whom he named Luther, proved disappointing. While Luther worshipped Alois and quivered before his master at every shift of tone, he did not seem otherwise alert. Moreover, he had nervous habits. On this night, as Alois shouted at him to stop howling, poor Luther watered the floor.

Afterward, Alois had his regrets. The dog, after all, did adore him. First, however, he whipped him. Even as Luther tried to crawl away, the poor

bottom of the beast became soaked in his own outpourings. All the while, he was yelping in full terror. The uproar woke the children. Alois-Junior came out first, then Angela, and Adi at the last, not yet two years old, but agile enough to get out of his low bed and walk into the midst of this. Klara leaped up to seize him. She was ready for the worst, she hardly knew what—that the child would step into the urine, that he would cry for her breast, that Alois might strike them both—she had seen the look in her husband's eye when Adi became too greedy with her nipple. None of this happened, however. To the contrary, the child looked with solemn interest at the whimpering dog, then at the flailing hand of the father, and the boy's blue eyes had a gleam, a look of remarkable intensity for one so small. She had seen it on his face when suckling him. He would stare at her with the tender expression of a lover overwhelmed for a moment by the implicit equality of flesh to flesh, soul upon soul. At such instants, she felt as if this child was closer to her and knew more about her than anyone.

Now, as Adolf stared at the wet dog and then at the over-flushed face of his father, there was no tenderness in this look, but much comprehension.

Klara felt an odd panic as if she must now startle the little boy into weeping so that she could give him her breast and thereby remove him from the room. And, she succeeded. Adi burst into a rage as she took him up, bore him away, and force-fed him. Indeed, armed with his first tooth, he nipped her enough for Klara to cry out, whereupon he stopped bawling long enough to give a deep and hearty chuckle.

From the room she had just quit, she could hear Alois bellowing.

“That dog can’t learn to control himself,” he cried out of his own pain at the awful turn the evening had taken. Luther was bleeding at the mouth from blows he had received full-face on his muzzle, but in turn, Alois’ palm had a small but ugly laceration from raking one fierce slap across a broken incisor in the middle of Luther’s sad front teeth.

-4-

It will be noted that if I am a memoirist and a biographer, I do write about my people more like a reasonably good novelist. I am ready, by turn to observe them sardonically, objectively, ironically, sympathetically, judgmentally, even compassionately. Nor am I often sinister. This should not come as a surprise. Why gratify a casual reader's notion of how a devil is supposed to behave?

From the onset of our service, the Maestro has instructed us to make humankind our ongoing study. He even encourages us to feel close to what is godly in people as well as keening to the spoils that may be there later. To comprehend the nobler facets of humankind, precisely those that can present obstacles to us, is important. If we had religious Orders in our muster, I might

be the equivalent of a Jesuit. I share with them a fundamental understanding. I am always ready to acquire a sympathetic comprehension of an adversary—I see it as my duty to be ready, indeed, to know more about godly sentiments than all but the most gifted of the angels.

That may be why the Maestro encourages us to speak of God as the D.K. (At least those of us who work in German-speaking lands. In America, it is the D.A.—dumb ass! In England, the B.F.—bloody fool! For France, A.S.—L'Ame Simple. In Italian, G.C.—gran cornutto! For Spanish—G.P.—grande payaso.) So D.K. stands for Dummkopf. It is not that we look upon God as stupid—never so! Moreover, we know from experience (and lost battles) that the Cudgels can, on occasion, be as bright and incisive as ourselves. Our use of the word Dummkopf comes, I expect, from the Maestro's determination to wean us from our greatest weakness—the unwilling admiration we feel for the Almighty. As the Maestro never allows us to forget, God may be powerful, but He is not All Mighty. Hardly so. We, after all, are also here. If the D.K. is the Creator, we are His most profound and successful critics.

All the same, we have to recognize that the Angels have succeeded in convincing most of human kind that our leader is the Evil One. So, our best recourse, the Maestro suggests, is to take pride in the term. When I write E.O., or speak of the Evil One, it is with full knowledge of the irony of the concept. The Maestro has given us so much, our subtle master. "Leave excessive reverence to the God-worshippers," he tells us. "They need it. They are always on their knees. But we have work to do, and it is tricky. I recommend that you keep thinking of Him as the Dummkopf. For, indeed, given what He could have achieved, this is what He is. Remember: It is our universe to gain. It is His to lose. Keep calling Him the Dummkopf."

-5-

The outpouring of the urine, the shit, and the blood of Luther became the first in a series of episodes remarkable for their powers of transmogrification—that is to say, dramatic and thoroughgoing metamorphosis.

So, for example, Adolf's bowel movements now began to dominate Klara's life in the house on Linzerstrasse. Before the episode with Luther took place, she had certainly been alert, no matter how often Adi soiled his wrapping cloths, to keep the child clean, indeed, the act, as I have remarked, became a dalliance between mother and boy. She wiped him so carefully that his eyes shone with transmogrificational delight. He discovered Heaven. There it was, right up in his anus next to the gas and the cramps. All the while,

his mother subtly, tenderly, delicately expunged the soil, wet or dry, from his rosebud, (which was, of course, Klara's secret name for her dear baby's incomparably dear little hole—die Rosenknospe.) She was so proud of its pink sheen that she could not even suppress her joy when her step-children were watching. Indeed, unlike other good mothers in Braunau, she barely bothered to teach Angela how to substitute for her. She was, after all, wholly superior to the unhappy elements in the procedure. His stool, (which could on occasion be as rank as any other colicky child) did not occasion her disgust. If the outpouring was outrageous in smell, or what was worse—gave a hint of the empty cavern that lurks in the odor of grave illness—her breath remained calm. But she preferred the stink to be rich enough to overpower anyone else. The stronger, the better. A sign of health. Such was her love for Adi.

Yes, love sparkled between them. His eyes danced as she dredged his cheeks with feather-smooth wipes of the rag, and her eyes—whether she knew it or not—were full of admiration that his little penis stood so erect. She, in turn, would giggle and coax it back (most properly) as they both laughed. For, of course, it jumped up again. Whereupon she kissed the tip, (once), and then

blushed. Be assured! She did not allow her mind to suggest that such an act might be subject to Confession. No, not with such innocent joy.

All this had to change after the episode with Luther.

She lived again in high fear of Alois. Now, she was always in fear that Adi's swaddling cloths might bag open. What if Alois came upon a full plop on the floor? Once, stepping out of the parlor to start a dish in the kitchen, she returned in the next minute to see the child playing with his spoil—he had already plastered his upper lip and chin. She shuddered at the thought of Alois coming through the door.

So, training began. It was like trying to teach a bright but willful dog. In the beginning, Adi might even tug at her skirt, or take her to the closet that held the chamberpot and cry out for her to remove his cloth. After which, complimenting him for his prowess, they would go, two spirits in one, through the wiping. For such intelligence, she offered full praise. His eyes would glow.

She became, however, too ambitious. She wanted Adi to learn how to unsnap the safety pins that held his cloth. Indeed, he was able to. Day by day, success followed success, until one morning, he pricked his finger. After that,

he would not go near the pins again. She lost patience. He had come so near and now he refused to continue. Finally, she scolded him, and that was certainly the first time he had heard such a tone issue from his mother. He rebelled. Knowing how important he was to her, his response was keen—he felt the same clarity of mind with which he had watched Alois beat Luther. At that moment, Adi had been illumined by new knowledge. He did not measure the difference between a dog and a man, not yet, for Luther was as much a person to him as his father, but he could see the instant result: Luther had collapsed into abject terror but the dog still loved his master.

So would Klara love him, he decided, even when he would not obey her. Taken out of his cloth and allowed to run naked from the waist down, he began (never when his father was at home) to leave it on the floor. Sometimes he would do it right next to the chamber pot, which brought Klara so close to screaming that Adi could hear every sound she did not make, and felt in consequence masterful. He had no fear of Klara not even when she came close to striking him.

He went too far. One day when she was in the midst of waxing her kitchen floor, he spread his excrement over the upholstered arm of the parlor

couch, studied it, knew by a new tumult in his chest—so curious in sensation—that this was different. Risk was present. All the same, he would show it to her. He did.

This time she stood stock-still. She sensed that he had done it on purpose, and so did not say a word, merely cleaned the sofa by which time he had an attack of diarrhea and the floor was dirty again. He began to laugh and to bawl, but she did no more than sigh and clean him soundlessly in a listless loveless fashion. This made such an impression on him that he awoke in the middle of the night and went to her bedroom. Alois had been called to Passau for preliminary interviews and the house had not seen him for a week, but just before midnight he had come home. Since the boy enjoyed going to his mother's bed whenever she was alone, he was surprised, even as he cracked the door, to hear a little gasping, and wheezing, and then the bull-roar of Alois' voice. It came in spasms. Beneath it and above it were his mother's cries, soft, and full of the oddest torture. Those cries spoke of joy soon to come, so soon to come, yes, just beyond reach, yes, now, almost! No, not yet! Through the half-open door (kept open particularly for her to hear him should he cry) he saw a sight his mind would not take in, not at once. Something

looked like four arms and four legs and two people, but one of them was upside down. He could make out Alois' bald head and side-whiskers pressed between his mother's legs. Then, without a word his father sat up. He was now sitting on her face!

Adolf walked away as silently as he had entered, but he had no doubt. His mother was betraying him. Just then he heard a final set of cries intense enough to turn him back toward the room. From what he could see by whatever moonlight was coming through the window, his father had begun to belabor Klara with all of his body, his big belly slapping on her belly. And she was grunting like a dog. So full of contentment! "You beast, you are an ugly man, you are an animal, you!" and then again, "You, yes, you, yah, yah, yah." There was no question. She was happy. Ja!

He would never forgive her. That much the two-year-old knew.

This time Adolf went all the way back to his room. He could, however, still hear them. In the bed next to him, Alois-Junior. and Angela were giggling. "Goosey, goosey," they kept saying back and forth.

-6-

He began to bawl for his milk not thirty minutes after Klara had sunk into the best sleep she had known for years.

Must one suppose that because a child's deepest reactions seem to have a half-life of no more than thirty minutes, they cannot be profound? Because of that betrayal, he might never love his mother as much again. Yet, his feelings were heightened. There was pain in his love now, and an anger that revealed itself by nipping at her breast with his new tooth. Indeed, for a few days, he felt close to Luther, and when drowsy, would sleep beside the dog through an afternoon. Truth, he saw the hound as a sibling, and this brotherly affair went on until Adolf began to take too much advantage of the beast,

punching him in the belly, trying to poke his eyes, and sometimes loosing a kick to the ribs. When the dog began at last to growl at his approach, Adolf would whine and run to Klara. There was a period when her delight in breast-feeding was gone. The tooth had done it. The days of weaning were at hand.

In those private councils of her mind that would never be available to her child, her stepchildren, her husband, nor even to the confessional box, she had come to the conclusion that she must have another child. If this came in part from the old fear, even now, that Adolf might not live, she also feared that she would never love him as much again, no, not as once she had, and so maybe there should be another child.

Besides, she was entering a new time in her marriage. She looked forward to Alois approaching their bed. For on such evenings—after all these years—desire came alive again, desire was there!—down in the marrow, deep!

We may remember that the last time we saw Alois, he was burying his nose and lips in Klara's vulva, his tongue as long and demonic as a devil's phallus. (Be it said: we are not without our contributions to these arts.) Alois was certainly being aided by us. Never before had he given himself so completely to this exercise, and quickly he had become good at it, and so

quickly, that no explanation is possible unless we are given credit as well.

(Which is why we speak of the Evil One when joining in the act—we do have the power to pass these lubricious gifts to men and women even when we are not planning to turn them into clients.)

By morning, Alois could not believe he had done it. All that! To lower himself to such an extent! In bald fact, and to make her pay for such bottoming on his part, he had, we must recall, clumped his buttocks once more over her nose and mouth—precisely the frightful sight that drove Adolf back to his bed and caused him to bawl for milk not a half-hour later.

Yet, by morning, Alois also felt tender towards Klara. This unexpected gentleness in concert with the astonishing pleasure he had given her by way of his tongue, a joy whose unexpected preciosities had conducted her up to, yes, all-but-occult regions, had also left her ready enough to forgive the rotten part. (Indeed, his heavy behind actually smelled better than Adi's.)

As a devil, I am obliged to live intimately with excrement in all its forms, physical and mental. I know the emotional waste of ugly and disappointing events, the sour indwelling poison of unjust punishment, the corrosion of impotent thoughts, and, of course, I also have to engage caca

itself. It is true. As devils, we live in shit and work with it. So, we often look to comprehend a marriage through the eye of the cloaca—and I will add—that is not the worst way since parenthood is not only the crown but the outhouse of marriage. As St. Odon of Cluny stated so unforgettably in a remark worthy of the best of devils: inter faeces et urinam nascimur—between shit and piss are we born. That leads me to say that the proper study of marriage resides not only in partnership, congeniality, boredom, predictable habit, daily annoyance, verbal scuffles, and daily despair, but in the guts and smear of it all—the comradely knowledge of all the forbidden tastes, smells, and bodily nooks. Indeed, if all of that were absent, the sacrament would have less foundation. On caca, is marriage based. So I would assert. You, in turn, are free to reject my opinion because I am a devil, after all, and we do look for the lowest common denominator to any truth. Small wonder if the condign properties of waste are part of our province.

-7-

Alois' promotion came through. The Finance-Watch named him to the post of Chief Customs Officer at Passau, and Klara was now without doubt that she was married to a man of achievement.

On the other hand, they could hardly rent their house before Alois was due to work at his new post in Passau. That was a full day's travel from Braunau. So, there were weeks at a time when Alois had to live apart from the family. In consequence, Adolf could loll in the big bed next to his mother.

If it was grievous that Klara had to put him aside whenever Alois come home, so did the child also learn that the loss of such happiness would be regained so soon as Alois was off again to Passau.

This condition lasted for a year. Even when the family did make the move to Passau, Alois had to oversee other border towns and was, therefore, absent nearly as much as before—which permitted Adolf to sleep again close to the nocturnal warmth of his mother.

In Passau, the new position not only gratified Alois' vanity, but threatened his confidence. Back in Braunau, a less important station, the smugglers rounded up had usually been petty individuals. Most of the product examined was agricultural; weighings were tedious. Braunau might be nicely situated on the river Inn, but even its architecture was humdrum.

In Passau, Austrian customs, by mutual agreement, operated on the German side of the Danube. The difference was highly visible. Passau had once been ruled by a Prince-Bishop, and so could boast of medieval towers. Some of its churches dated back to the onset of the Middle Ages; others were High Renaissance. Passau's walls reflected the grandeur of dedicated duty, ancient crimes, torture chambers, dark secrets, by-gone glory, and—much to the point for Alois—criminal smugglers with imagination enough to be something of a match for him.

So, he was not without discomfort in the new position. If, until now, his uniformed presence had been a full warning to would-be malefactors, he knew that much depended upon the rigor of his professional manner. So he took professional pains to present a personality of monumental official calm, a man who had set an incorruptible seal on himself. Let travellers know that he was not the fellow with whom to play games. He had studied many an upper-class customs officer—those with university learning, some with livid, invaluable dueling scars. They were the ones to model oneself after.

Taking up his command in Passau left him feeling, however, less inside his own good Austrian skin. His tone, in consequence, became a touch too harsh. Occasionally some trifle would provoke him unduly. Once he went into a tirade because an underling addressed him as “Herr Official” rather than “Herr Senior Official Hitler.” He could sense that this Passau cohort of subordinates was better educated than the younger officers at Braunau. Were these new faces growing critical of him? Now and again, looking down from his post at the rush of the Danube below the Customs’ bridge, his eyes would sparkle with tears. He would find himself thinking of Braunau, and of the two women buried in the region, dear carnal-spirited Franziska, yes, and for an

instant he would also mourn Anna Glassl. No beauty, but she had known what to do under the sheets.

He smoked all the time. His nickname, unknown to him, was The Cloud of Smoke. (Here, the German is good enough to offer: *Der Rauchfung!*) “And today, what is the mood of der Rauchfung?” one young officer might ask another as he came on duty. Alois knew these juniors were resentful because he did not allow them the liberty that he enjoyed—nonetheless, he knew that the very injustice of it would enforce his authority. A good officer must be fair for the most part, yet still exercise certain specific inequalities. Done judiciously, that proved effective. One's inferiors were reduced a notch.

Now that Klara and the children had joined him in Passau, he also became more severe with his offspring. Alois-Junior and Angela soon learned not to speak to him unless they were asked a direct question. Otherwise, they were not to interrupt his thoughts. If Alois-Junior happened to be outside, the father would put two fingers to his lips and whistle. It was identical to the call he used to summon Luther. In turn, Alois-Junior, fresh-cheeked, strong, stocky, and with a face like his father's, had driven Klara and Angela into hysterics one afternoon by picking up a monumental turd that Adi had chosen

to deposit on the parlor rug. When stepmother and sister began to scream at the sight of it in Junior's hand, dark, doughty, and forbidding as a primeval club, he chose to stalk after them, his eyes wild. What a mischief! Klara and Angela were crying out in terror. This was a monstrosity! Then, Adi joined the chorus. He screamed with the rest even as he chose to prance right behind Alois-Junior, and kept on with it until his big brother, tiring of the sport, tore off an inch of the stuff, whirled around and planted it on the tip of Adolf's nose.

That evening Klara told Alois-Senior. The beating that ensued was comparable to the attack on Luther. Alois-Junior could just about crawl off to school next day. Profound, after that, was the discipline in the house. When Alois came home from his duties, the children dared at most to whisper. Klara, unwilling to upset him, was also quiet. Supper was eaten in silence. The smell of Alois' breath, rich with meat and sour from beer, mingled with the aroma of red cabbage.

After dinner, he would take to the armchair, select one of his long-stem pipes, tamp his tobacco into the bowl with all the authority that is ready to reside in the thumb of a man of official importance, and then proceeded to

overpower the air with his own smoke. Alois-Junior and Angela went to their room once permission was given. But, Adi was called forward.

His father would cup the three-year-old's head in his hand, and with a divided grin—fifty percent affection, fifty percent pure meanness of spirit—would blow smoke into Adolf's face. The boy would cough. The father would chuckle.

As soon as Alois let go of his head, Adolf would smile and run off to the water closet. There, he might throw up. Sometimes, head bent over the pail, the three-year-old would remember the sounds of Alois making love to Klara, and such groans accompanied him through the lurches of his esophagus. He kept asking himself why his mother never complained about the smoke.

She did not dare. She sensed that the greatest provocation to her husband would be to comment on his pipe.

Moreover, Adolf had provided her with new cause for fear. Cleaning his bottom one day (and she did not make this large discovery until he was three—such were her curious proprieties) she came to notice that he had one testicle, not two.

A town doctor reassured her that this medical phenomenon was not fearsome. Such boys often grew up to be men with large families.”

“So he will not be different from others when he goes to school?”

“Boys of his condition are sometimes active. Highly active. That is all.”

These kind words did not soothe Klara. The missing testicle left one more stain on the Poelzl family. Her sister Johanna was not only a hunchback but, according to Alois, half-mad. And then there was a first cousin—a true imbecile. Not to speak of all of Klara's dead brothers, her dead sisters, her own dead children. There was not enough, she decided, of Alois' strong constitution in Adolf, no, none of the strength Alois had so obviously passed on to Alois-Junior. This was also her fault. She had loved her husband on the night that Adolf had been conceived, but only on that night, and in a way—was it unholy?—such a night!

But now—could it be too late?—she would say that she loved her husband again. She came to this conclusion slowly, step by step, over many months, but on one fine night in June, a year and a half after his transfer to Passau, she felt a new respect for him. For just that afternoon—he had learned

that in another six months, he would be transferred to Linz, the capital of the province, there to serve as Chief Customs Officer. It was the most important assignment you could find in all the Service between Salzburg and Vienna and it came at a fine time since he would be ready to retire in a few years and this promotion would increase the size of his pension.

On that night, they conceived. Perhaps there was never an hour when she loved Alois more simply, or realized she wanted a second son so much. Little Adi with his one testicle, had put a small but year-long horror into her heart. She did not dare to think any longer that Adi might live a long life. On the contrary, they needed another child. The new one, she decided, must belong to Alois as much as to herself.

-8-

Edmund was born on March 24, 1894, a few weeks before Adolf would be five. Klara had told him that he would soon have a brother or—if God so desired—a sister, and Adolf was ready either way. He looked forward to playing with the baby on arrival. He expected to meet a child half his age, at least as measured by size, a living creature ready to speak, but in any event, certainly able to listen. On the approach to Klara's bed, however, he was aghast for he saw no more than a cloth bundle on her breast with a face inside it as wizened as an old apple.

Having been sent the night before to a neighbor's house where he went through the discomfort of sleeping on a small bed between Angela and Alois-

Junior (who kept pinching each other over his intervening body) he knew that changes were coming. This perception turned into his first large sorrow when, next day, as he rushed to his mother's bed, the midwife put out a hand as large as his face and said, "Stay back. Don't hurt the baby."

Klara made it worse. She put a hand on his head. But it was passing in its touch and he could feel no love. Tears came to his eyes.

"Ah, the poor little one," said the midwife and led him out of the room. "In a few days," she said, "you can get nearer to the baby."

"Will he talk to me?"

"Oh, you will be the first to understand him." With that, she laughed and returned to the bed where his mother lay.

He rarely got near enough to Klara. Yet just a few weeks ago, he had been able to enjoy the same conversation each morning with her.

"Mommie," Adi would ask, "are you the most beautiful woman in the world?"

She would tease his hair. "What do you think?"

"I think you are the most beautiful."

She would hug him to her breast. The love her breasts held for him was not so complete as it used to be. Yet, she would pretend that it was, even if a year had passed since she had stopped feeding him. Now, he would gorge on the cream puffs she often prepared for dessert, he would wolf them down at such a rate that Alois-Junior would complain audibly if Klara was present, or, in her absence, rap a knuckle on his kid-brother's head. Klara, prey to new uneasiness at how little attention she gave to Adi these days, would defend his right to the cream puffs. "He is so little," she would say, "he needs them more than you."

Now, following the birth, Klara was often too fatigued to cook. The temporary servant made cream puffs that tasted like sour milk. Klara, in her turn, was breast-feeding Edmund all the time. So it seemed to Adolf. He experienced a new sorrow that blended with the sad undertone of the church bells in Passau, so many bells, so frequent.

Now, when he tried to ask if she was the most beautiful woman in the world, she would laugh unhappily. "Oh, I am an old worn-out girl," she would say, "I am not beautiful, Dolfchen. But your sister Angela will be."

Adi did not agree. Angela was undependable. Angela was always ready to pinch him. She was nice, at times, but treacherous. "No, you are more beautiful than Angela," he would say, and his mother would shake her head.

Meanwhile, much of the time, his father was in Linz. One week after Edmund's birth, Alois took up new and full-time duties there. Since Linz was fifty miles east of Passau, Alois did not bring back the weight of his strong voice more than twice a month. So, during the day, when Angela and Alois-Junior were away at school, Adi would be alone with his mother and the infant, yet Klara still did not have a lot of time for him. And at night, he no longer could be certain where he would sleep. Alois-Junior would often take over his cot, and Adi would have to move to Angela's bed. Sometimes she would tell him that he did not smell good. "So, Adi, your breath is rotten," she would say. Often, he would put a blanket on the floor to escape her.

He was also afraid to go outside. There were boys his age and older playing in the field back of the house, and their yells were fearsome. He spent his time looking at the illustrations in a book his father had bought about the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. He decided he would like to be a brave soldier. Could he be? He was so afraid!

One afternoon, after school and much at Klara's bidding, Alois-Junior pulled Adolf out of the house, and led him to the field behind the house. Yes, he had known it would be so. A dozen small boys were playing at war.

Alois-Junior studied the group, then selected the leader of one army, a stout five-year-old. "This is my brother," Alois told him, "and if you let anyone on the other side hit Adolf, you will hear from me." He punched the boy on the arm hard enough to certify his words, and departed.

When Adolf came home that evening, Alois-Junior told him, "From now on, I eat the cream puffs first. As many as I want. If you cry to your mother, momma's boy, I will not protect you on the field."

"I won't cry," said Adi, holding his breath as tightly as if he were clinging to a rope.

Next day, he went to the game by himself. He was more afraid of Alois-Junior's derision than of any blows he might take in the battle.

Actually, there had been little enough punishment on the first day. The fat boy was quick to use his own body to shield Adi from every attack.

Besides, it did not take long to grasp the basic principle. Divided into two teams, the boys took turns chasing each other. It was really not a war. More

like tag. Once you were touched, you were dead. And each melee lasted but a few minutes. After which, the boys, close to breathless, would count the losses, take a breath, and start up again. On the first charge across the field, somebody would always get knocked down. Once, when the fat boy whom Alois-Junior had chosen was waylaid by two kids from the other team, it even happened to Adolf. A rude shove on the shoulder and he was slammed to the ground. Earth drove up his nose.

He did not cry. It took a considerable effort of his will. In the following minute, he had to negotiate with himself in order to keep from weeping. He was hurt that no one had applauded his new-found stoicism. His feelings were as bruised as the scrape on his cheek. His nose burned from the outrage to his stuffed-up nostrils, but he managed not to cry.

He also managed to get through the rest of the battles that day without another collision. He was quick to dart away whenever an enemy soldier came near. To his delight, he even tagged one boy.

On the next day, his face was in the dirt again. The fat boy was rueful about it and begged him not to tell his brother. Adi had the pleasure of patting him on the back. No cause for alarm, he announced, not a word would he say.

-9-

Following young Adolf's first war games, I was instructed to take a more direct interest in his development.

Be it understood that further investiture is never routine. Each case is unique. The average man or woman assumes one can lose one's soul to the devil on an instant, and permanently, but the premise is false and has to be reinvigorated every Sunday by the most dedicated and mediocre ministers. The real situation is that we do not appropriate people by way of a lightning flash. Nor does Satanic entrapment brand a man or woman forever as our vassals. Rather, it is an ongoing tug of war. So soon as we seek to invest our powers in a client, the Cudgels are likely to appear. Outright possession rarely

occurs. Indeed, after a series of such battles, the odd soul actually captured by the Cudgels or ourselves can bear more resemblance to a throwaway than a prize. (Schizophrenic people can be the victims of such contests.)

Entrapment, then, is not free of paradox. The clients that we find most difficult to approach are those with the greatest potential. Conversely, individuals who are easy to pick up rarely prove of real service. It takes so little to traduce a drunk or an addict. We do, however, polish what is left of their charm. That helps to consume a little more of the compassion of their families, especially if the mother, father, or any of the siblings are obsessed with not losing the last of their charity. In effect, we injure that family's God-loving hearts. But such is simple work. Gains are small. Ultimate ends are not served. Our final aim, after all, is to draw the majority of humans away from allegiance to the D.K.

There is, however, another factor in every contest—an economic factor. It concerns the separate resources of Divine energy and of Satanic energy. They differ.

I can allow that even in the higher cadres of devils and angels, we hardly know who has more Time to give to a contest once we vie for possession of a

given man or woman. Of course, this does not involve daily happenings if they are immense. The D.K. can, for example, disburse whole bonanzas of divine substance into His sunsets which, it must be admitted, do bolster human morale. There, I would call Him a spendthrift, but, then, we devils devote more attention to the expenditures of Time involved in securing a new client. To give years to a promising varlet who eventually goes over to the Cudgels leaves a budgetary blemish on one's record. So, when choosing a target, we try to exhibit more acumen than our opponents.

For example, we rarely fail to attend the joinings of rich and powerful people (so full of infidelity.). As has been noted, whether rich or poor, we do not ignore incest. Other copulations, however, particularly those illumined by angels, present a more demanding task—it is not routine to slip through their blockade. It seems—I dare to speak here only for myself—as if the E.O. has never been able to accept his failure to be present in the hour when Jesus Christ was conceived.

Fortunately for us, Jesus proved to be a not untypical Son. The record we are furnished informs us that He was often at odds with His Father.

But I stray from my point. The prevailing fact of our existence is that we are obliged to live within a limited budget, and so, our projects are chosen with discretion. Except in special instances, we, therefore, do not take large interest in the early development of children. "Over the first few years," our Maestro will remark, "a child is caught between the need for love and the development of its will. These inclinations are so naturally at odds with each other that an early approach is rarely necessary."

Except for unusual cases like Adi's, we exercise no intervention until the age of seven. Well into the nineteenth century, a very young child was always in danger of being carried off by one disease or another.

Once turned seven, a prospective client's health becomes easier for us to assess. On the other hand, our Maestro terms the next five or six years: The Age of Clods. "They are now encountering the world in its basic form—their school years. Nearly all of them rush toward habit, routine, and stupidity as the most immediate forms of protective insulation. More often, then, our selections commence with adolescence. Now, the rich energies invested by the D.K. are there at last for us to subvert.

I have spoken at this length of our cautious process of selection because I wish to emphasize how uncommon was the special attention given to Adi when in his early years. That his name was Adolf Hitler was, after all, of no importance then.

All the same, I had lived (by proxy) in the demonic instant of his conception, and had then been assigned to review the work of the devils who would oversee his family's activities. It was light surveillance. Our jargon for this kind of action was milk-runs, an expression we employed long before it was adopted by Army Air Force pilots in the Second World War. Any one of our devils might pass by a house in the hours before dawn, and by way of the small and large family storms that had transpired since the last visit, new information was ingested. It required no large expenditure unless the abode was guarded by a Cudgel. Normally, however, one could make a quick pass by the house and sweep up the findings. While humans slept, we did our work.

I had been able then to keep up with a close history of the Hitler family over all the years since Adolf had been born. (Be it understood that my devils also kept track of numerous other projects in that region of Austria.) If what

my agents had offered up to now was modest, it had, nonetheless, sufficed. Reviewing Adolf's early years, I confess that I saw no vast promise in the boy. He was outrageously in need of love and damnably vulnerable. The odds were that he would creep through life with a self-protective ego. At least, so I would have judged if the Evil One had not been present at his conception. That event, however, had to affect my judgment. Even on the busiest nights, the Hitler family was included on every milk-run.

This routine of careful but passive observation was overturned altogether for me on the day that Alois-Junior dragged Adi off to the boys' game of war. The E.O. intervened. I received a direct message: "Take closer care of him now. Stiffen his spine. We can lose much of his potential if we don't take steps."

-10-

When given a direct order, there is no room for rebellion. I did what I was told to do. I stiffened the boy's spine. Indeed, I will make the claim that the task was accomplished with finesse. For I did not inject any special funds into his courage or his will; rather, I provided him with enough wit to carry out the job himself since he had been the one who chose not to weep when his face was in the dirt. Afterward, he had also displayed his own cunning at finding ways to avoid physical punishment

I was aware again of the superior insight of the Maestro. Adi showed a few signs that he might be worth the work. The child might even be as much superior to an average five-year-old as a young race-horse to a run-of-the-mill mule. I enjoyed working with him, and that was just as well since the order

had come during a period when I could not afford new inroads on my budget. Improving a child's courage usually demands the disbursement of precious stores, precisely those funds we have managed to steal from the Cudgels. Of necessity, we have become skilled at impersonating angels. Even an adult, feeling our infusion of love, tends to believe it is bona-fide. I suspect Kierkegaard had just that in mind when he proposed that people had to be wary of feeling too saintly, since they could not be certain of the source of such feelings. They could be, then, working for Satan.

I might as well add that we devils are human to this degree—a fine return on our investment puts us in the best of moods, so I had come to enjoy being with Adi as he showed his capacity to improve the war games.

He soon saw, and I believe this came as much from his perception as mine, that outposts were necessary. It was wrong to send soldiers over the hill with no knowledge of what they might encounter. A scout from each army had to attempt, therefore, to work his way up close enough to the summit to gain a look at the dispositions of the other side. Following in logical sequence came another change in the rules—an advancing army had to be free to move its forces from flank to flank, even as it climbed the hill. The defense could

looking for us. We love them. We do not disabuse them. We enjoy them.

Popular writers usually believe they are working both for God and their own prosperous selves. All the while, we are encouraging them to steep their readers in baths of misperception. The profit comes to us. Misperception of reality will, at the least, waste God's Time, and that is a form of compound interest in our economy.

BOOK VI

THE FARM

This time, Alois had a serious reason for moving. He was going to retire. He would buy a farm. In the last year of his Customs work, he had begun to look about, and in February of 1891, he bought what he deemed right to the right property in a town called Hafeld, thirty miles from Linz. In April, Klara and the children moved from Passau to this newly chosen abode. It was, indeed, a most pleasant. The closest school was in the nearest hamlet, Fischham, a mile away, and there, after the summer, Adi would enter the first grade. Meanwhile, over the next few months Klara could live on the farm with their four offspring while Alois completed his service in Linz.

-1-

This time, Alois had a serious reason for moving. He was going to retire. He would buy a farm. In the last year of his Customs work, he had begun to look about, and by February of 1895, he bought what he deemed might be the right property in a town called Hafeld, thirty miles from Linz. In April, Klara and the children moved from Passau to this newly chosen abode. It was, indeed, a rural retreat. The closest school was in the nearest hamlet, Fischlham, a mile away, and there, after the summer, Adi would enter the first grade. Meanwhile, over the next few months Klara could live on the farm with their four offspring while Alois completed his service in Linz.

Of course, retirement could not come without opening a few cracks in what had been a most impressive edifice. I speak of Alois' ego. When we consider the meager materials out of which he had had to construct it, he may even have been entitled to taste a little meditative nectar.

If only he had enjoyed working at his final post in Linz. Then, his last title, Chief Customs Officer, would have left a residue of real satisfaction. But the problems with personnel that he had encountered at Passau were now magnified. Linz was a major center of attention for the Finance-Watch. The capital of a most important province, Upper-Austria, Customs was stocked, therefore, with ambitious junior officers and they kept together and seemed never at a loss to show their subtle contempt for the failings of senior officials. Most of these young men were ready to take for granted the future attainment of high office, and their confidence left Alois feeling out of joint. For the first time in all the years that he had been wearing a uniform, he did not always strike the passing eye as an immaculate official. (That now demanded too many pains.) Nor was he as punctual as once he had been. Sometimes, at the point of issuing disciplinary reprimands, he would hesitate long enough to

contemplate the possible repercussions. Worse. There were one or two occasions when he forgot what he was about to say next.

For just such a reason, he eased up on smoking restrictions. He no longer enjoyed confronting the inheld wrath of younger officers. But, in consequence, he enjoyed his own tobacco less. He also began to feel as if all his associates, young and old, were now impatient for him to retire. He had put in, after all, near to forty years of service. ~~While he could continue for~~ ^(He had the right to) another twelve-months ~~and even another~~, he did not deem it wise. Small, steady inroads on his vanity kept lowering him into a modest dream. What if he chose to become a gentleman farmer? That would not be so bad, no, not out there in the autumn sun of his last good years. What the hell! Born a peasant, he could end as a well-to-do fellow who had gone back to the earth.

He had money enough. He could buy a decent farm outright. He would have his pension, and his savings—he and Klara had certainly exhibited thrift. Besides, he had in hand the sum and interest of a large part of three wives' dowries. It could be said that the first two had brought real money to the union. If Anna Glassl had succeeded in recovering, through law, half of her large dowry due to their separation, still, the half remaining was not small.

Franzceska, while hardly up to that measure, was nonetheless the child of a prosperous farmer. Even old Johann Poelzl, Klara's father, had come forth with some long saved Kronen when they married.

On the other hand, Alois understood money only too well. Not all coin was equal. Deep in one's conscience, one had to pay a tithe for money that was not gained properly. Money gave back its reflection of how it had been acquired. Sometimes that gave him a passing chill. A good part of his prosperity could be seen as the flower which sprouted from the coffin-soil of dead wives' dowries.

During this last year of service, while Klara took care of the children in Passau and he was free in Linz, he had begun to feel too old for other women. That was when he told himself to go back to the earth. It was what he had always heard from Johann Nepomuk—"the real woman is in the fields." The old man had only to take one drink, and he would repeat it over and over. "The real woman—look for the real woman in the fields. Respect the fields."

It was an adage Alois could enjoy even if his present plans did not include heavy duty with the soil. His aim, rather, was apiculture. He was looking to develop beehives. He would market the honey. That would be his

crop. All the same, owning a little land might be equal to acquiring another limb, a fifth appendage so to speak, as important to a man with peasant roots as a trunk to an elephant.

Five years ago, about the time Adolf was born, he had bought a farm. In many a way that purchase had been more exciting to him than the birth.

Unlike the first three of Klara's babies, land was not going to die.

The reverse had occurred. The land did not perish, but his ownership did. The holding had been near Spital, about a hundred miles from where he was then working in Braunau, but he had had, even then, some notion of retiring there later. In the interim, it might be a good way to take care of his sister-in-law, Johanna Poelzl, in preference to having her dwell with them as a maid. He did not want Johanna in the parlor every night, not with that dome on her back.

All the same, he did feel some admiration for his sister-in-law. Johanna was not in the least afraid of God. She would put no trust in Him. "God," she would declare, "did not have to kill off so many of us in the Poelzl family." Alois could tip his hat to that. "She's not like my wife," he was fond of telling the tavern. "Klara is ready to kiss every cross she meets."

All the same, Johanna did not run the farm very well. Sooner or later, every hired man who worked there was antagonized by her sharp tongue. Finally, she decided to live again with her father and her mother—also named Johanna. If we recall, this Johanna was the one who had been Alois' mistress on an unforgettable occasion. ("Sie ist hier!")

Alois was able, however, to sell that first farm at a modest profit and so was not ill-disposed now to taking on the property in Hafeld. Here was a farm he could work himself. It was called the Rauscher Gut (which can be translated as the Breezy Estate) and it offered nine acres of pasture plus a wooden house under a thatched roof with good views of the mountains of the Salzkammergut. In addition, there were fruit and oak and walnut trees. A hayloft was in the stable and stalls for two horses and a cow, plus one prize sow.

?
DE [It seemed perfect.] After the purchase, (and only after the purchase) neighboring farmers were ready to hint to the new arrival that the land might be beautiful, but it was not necessarily going to be famous for its crops.

He looked upon these comments as exactly the kind of hazing that resident farmers would visit on a newcomer. Oh, he assured them, it did not

matter. The land would be given a rest. He was there to raise bees. That was his element. Good honey could become the most prosperous crop of them all.

Indeed, in the last days before his retirement ceremony (which was acceptably eulogistic to Alois and most impressive, even thrilling, to Klara) he did have a series of drinking nights as a closer way of saying farewell to his staff and to the decades of his work. Since he had no desire ever to be seen as a man who would moon over the past, he dwelt on his future, he bullied his junior associates, plus a couple of old cronies, and a few respected town officials to drink more than one stein with him on the merits and mysteries of bee-keeping. Indeed, he belabored each table on each night with so much concerning "the "mysterious psychology of these ~~fabulous~~ little creatures," that the junior officers would warn each other, "Tonight, let's try to keep the Cloud of Smoke from smoking us out with his bees."

In truth, he did see himself as something of a philosopher on this subject. What an achievement for an untutored peasant from the Waldviertel to be able to give a lecture equal to a university savant!

In these last weeks, then, before retirement, in the same Linz tavern he had frequented each night after his customs house shift, Alois spoke more and more of the higher concepts of apiculture. Honey bees formed an amazing world, he would inform his drinking cohort. "With rare exceptions, these tiny creatures offer up their lives to one purpose: It is to build a future for the generations who will follow. The honey they convert from nectar and pollen is not only for their own consumption, but, gentlemen, it is also made to feed their larvae." He nodded. "These larvae are installed in the tiniest hexagonal cells, a wonder to behold, because they are constructed symmetrically out of the very beeswax these insect workers make from pollen, which process, gentlemen, is so mysterious that it is not yet wholly understood even by the most modern chemists."

His company nodded, their spirits glum. This was not lively beer talk. But Alois, on these last nights, had become the kind of lecturer who is always ready to exhibit an incorruptible lack of sensitivity for his audience. "Some bees," he now remarked, "the heftier ones, become guards to watch over the entrances to the hive. Do you know? They are ready to go into battle at the cost of their lives. They will even fight off such powerful raiders as wasps or

spiders or termites. Yes, all the insect world, you see, is looking for a free meal in the honey. But that is only one of the obstacles to a peaceful life for the bee. All through the summer, many of these worker bees are constantly engaged in keeping the interior of the hive cool. How? By means of tireless activity. They never stop fanning their wings. A good many even wear out their wings. After which, they are ready to die. They give up their lives in this hard labor of creating a draft to cool the hive. Why? Because the larvae cannot survive in too much heat. Think of it. Thousands of wings all fanning away, even as others go out to forage and bring back more supplies from the fields of flowers. They collect the pollen in pods on their legs and then, flying back to the hive, they manage to stay aloft under the weight of loads of pollen and nectar that weigh more than their own bodies. I tell you, they create a society that is not unlike ours, but it is certainly more hard-working."

None of the junior officers were ready to argue. (If they did, he might go on for another hour.) It took one of the older town officials to reply. Taking several portentous sips of smoke from his pipe, he said, "Come, Alois, they are only insects."

"No, good sir! With all due respect, you are mistaken. There is much more to them than one would think. Some, I believe, live to finer purpose than the average human dolt. Let me say, they are one of the wonders of our universe."

-2-

I was not prepared for Alois' interest in these matters. Here was not the man I knew. While I could see his practical purpose, since the product was eminently salable, apiculture also had its risks, including the peril of receiving a serious number of bee stings. On the other hand, it might be reasonable to engage in such efforts rather than endangering his long-used heart by plowing a field, I was plagued, all the same, by an uneasy suspicion. Alois was too sincere in this enthusiasm. He was not sufficiently concerned with profit. That was what disturbed my understanding of him. The desire for money is the tap-root that usually

drives men like Alois into new activity. So the relative absence of this desire did suggest that Alois was ready to undertake this venture because it satisfied something I had not yet perceived in him.

I did recall that he had dabbled at keeping bees in one small town near Braunau, but soon saw a better reason. In these last few months, he had taken the pains to write a short article for a bee-keepers' journal and the piece was published. Alois had acquired a degree of book knowledge on the subject that provided him with a point of view on new modes of cultivation. Bee hives made of straw, he declared, would soon be outmoded. Skeps they were called, squat-ribbed domed objects about the size and shape of big-bellied human torsos, and these old skeps had their drawbacks. To harvest the honey, bee-keepers had to keep the population of the hive stunned with smoke. That left the hive in a near-comatose condition. It was a harsh and imprecise process. Sometimes, the skep had to be ripped open in order to collect the product. Despite the smoke, some honeybees were still active enough to sting the collector.

A new and much-discussed innovation was, however, being developed in England and in America. That was the point of his article.

Even in Austria, there were bee-keepers ready to do away with the old skep. For its time, it had been an improvement over the more barbaric practice—common through the Middle Ages—of chasing the bees out from their hole in a tree, but advanced bee-keepers were speaking these days of hives that could become the equivalent, or so his article proposed, of a metropolis for bees. This new housing, no greater in size than a small wooden cabinet, would be filled with wax trays installed vertically. The worker bees could then build their miniscule wax cells on both sides of each tray. And in a most orderly fashion! Since this cabinet could hold a number of trays, and each tray had room for thousands of cells in a grid of rows and files, some keepers calculated that each hive now bore resemblance to the giant apartment buildings of the future.

That had been the point of his article—visionary indeed—but to explain this venture to Klara, Alois chose to emphasize the pecuniary promise. Good money would come back from clean work, and Alois Jr. and Angela would help, he told her. Adi as well. He convinced her that the new project was eminently practical.

I was more than bothered. Klara might believe him but I did not. I had decided that Alois was looking to find a way to come nearer to the Dummkopf. That was not a matter I could afford to ignore.

-3-

Alois had never been one of our clients. He was by our measure an average man, which is to say, sufficiently corrupt to be available for our use should we be in true need of him. The assumption was that he would then be open. The Cudgels would hardly be guarding the fellow. To what end? What was there to protect? Whereas, when it came to Klara, we did not choose to go near. It would have proved punishing and again—to what end? We did not need her directly—as I have already remarked, evil children can issue nicely from the most loving mothers. Of course, average men and women find the thought repulsive. It rattles their faith in the Dummkopf. How could God allow it? A standard lament.

We felt no need to go near Klara, therefore. She was more useful to us as herself, innocent and nurtured by the attentions of the Cudgels. Klara, being gifted with depths of love, would soon be enchanted by the new one, Edmund, and that was certain to agitate Adolf's feelings.

Alois would be even better for such a purpose. He was so dependable in his strengths and habits, his productive contributions, his built-in cruelties (not to mention his crudities) that one could, if necessary, intensify or reduce the heat of Adolf's hatred for his father in such a way as to mold the boy. Depend on it—we depended on Alois.

But now, his outsize love for bees seemed out of character. Atheists like Alois, who attempt to go all the way to the grave without being challenged by the intimation that God may have created their universe, are not unlike pious virgins who fear the temptation of unholy heats. Such ladies can only accept their pinched carnality through a variety of counterfeits. So, too, do atheists have their substitutes by way of paganism, service to others, or, by now, technology—usually seen by them as the best possible solution to humankind's problems. Occasionally, they feel an exceptional allegiance to some phenomenon of nature. In Alois' case, it

happened to be the recognition that a collaboration could be possible between the mighty and the miniscule, himself and the bees.

Sufficiently concerned, I penetrated quickly one night into his mind. I gathered what I needed. I knew more now. Alois saw bees as living a life with parallels to his own. That was cause for apprehension in me. For Alois, bees in search of new fields of flowers were intimate little creatures he could understand.

On any warm day, such foragers know the heat of the sun and the intimate yearning that the sun can arouse in flower petals. Alois was not about to throw open any bolted door to the mystical side of himself, but in the innermost recess of his thoughts, it stirred him to think of the honeybee entering into the perfumed caverns of the flower. Under the burgeoning heat of the sun, the flower would surrender its nectar to the bee's tongue, even as the hairs of the honeybee were covered with pollen. In another moment, the same bee would separate from one passionate lust to dive into another, whichever fine flower of the same species was beckoning in the breeze, the creature ready again to gather more nectar while leaving pollen from the first flower on the second.

These images gave life to Alois. It was the balance between hard work and satisfied desire. He could feel close to that bee staggering back in flight, its pollen bags heavy, and a stomach full of nectar. Had not Alois, in his turn, given much to women and yet brought back much for himself, so much accumulated wisdom on how to deal with his customs-house corner of the world. By the end, he invariably knew what was true and what was false in declarations offered by strangers, particularly women who might wish to deceive him, yet could not, because he was wiser than they were. He possessed the true honey—wisdom. That was the knowledge of what others were up to, all those secrets held by passing travelers and commercial people, secrets as sweet as honey, all those little goods travelers looked to steal and keep for themselves. But he was there to capture their secrets. He could work as hard and long as any honeybee on the hottest and most productive day of summer to protect the glory, centuries old, of the exceptional Empire of the Hapsburgs. Not all of them had been great, he would admit, not all were even very good people, but the best of them had been, like Franz Josef, good, very good. As we know, Alois could find a resemblance to Franz Josef in his own features—the same sideburns, the

same dignity. It was said of the Emperor Franz Josef that he could work for endless hours at his necessary and near-to-endless duties. When necessary, he, Alois, was also ready. And yet they knew enough, both of them—the Emperor and himself—to comprehend that it was not enough to amass the honey; one must keep a taste for oneself.

Some people in Linz he knew, fools for the most part, had been shocked when gossips spoke of the actress, Fraulein Katharina Schratt, whom Franz Josef had taken for a mistress. How could this be? He had a wife so beautiful—Empress Elizabeth. The news had spread like a spill of oil that has no boundaries. But it had not been shocking to Alois. He understood. Men had to keep some share of the honey for themselves.

Let me not be altogether captivated, however, by the voluptuous swells of Alois' meditation. In truth, he also had some fear of bees. Once, in previous years, he had been stung so ferociously and apocalyptically (if I may put it so) that he never forgot the attack of vertigo it caused. Such power to create pain! That it could exist in creatures so small! It could not have come from the honeybee alone, he decided. Such pain must express the rage of the sun. With that, Alois was familiar. He had worked through

many an August afternoon, stuffed into his uniform. Of course he knew the rage of the sun, and honeybees were agents of the sun even as he was an agent of the Hapsburgs, and thereby close to the greatness of ultimate power.

Could these epiphanies be the product of his approaching retirement?

I looked forward with my own trepidation to the changes I could not anticipate once he began to live with his family on the farm.

-4-

On the very night in April when they slept in the house at Hafeld for the first time, Klara became pregnant again. Until then, she had remained with the children in Passau. Edmund had been ailing, and it was winter. Moreover, Alois would not be able to join them permanently at the farm until his retirement at the end of June. By April, however, Klara decided to brave the difficulties and, right after Easter, accompanied by Angela, Adolf, Edmund, and the sum of their possessions, she accomplished the move to Linz. It was made even more difficult since she was without Alois-Junior to help her with the luggage—he had had to stay behind and board with a

neighbor until the end of their school year. Angela, however, was of great help to her. She had insisted on not finishing her school year, but coming along instead to help Klara.

"School is not that important," she said. "I will make up what is lost in the next year, but for now you will need me at the farm. I want to be with you at the farm."

She was right. Klara knew as much, and was most moved. I would say that is the moment when she began to love Angela as a true daughter. The character, the intensity and the fidelity of love—or, at least we perceive it so are measurable stations on the ascent of a mountain which is without an ascertainable summit—one can only speak of the stations reached. Klara was wise enough in her innocence to know that Angela's feelings were genuine. She liked school well enough but she cared more for Klara's well-being and so, Klara in turn, by the measure of her love was no longer a good step-mother but much, much more.

Nonetheless, whatever the difficulties, she embarked by train from Passau early in the day and her husband was at the station in Linz with a

large wagon and two work horses to carry their trunks, valises, packing crates and packages over the last thirty miles to Hafeld.

This portion of the trip lasted from noon to dark, but the day had been warm, and Alois, to everyone's surprise, entertained the children with one song after another—his voice was rich, and Klara, who had a clear if delicate soprano, would join him when she knew the words. Alois was in a rare mood, and proud of his skill with the horses and wagon. It was some years since he had gotten up on a buckboard, and he had almost hired a driver, but given his oncoming responsibilities as a farmer, he took on the project himself.

The previous owner had—as was local custom—stocked each fireplace with logs and kindling, and so the rooms, before long, were warm. What with a carefully packed jar of potato soup, bread, and liverwurst, they had enough to eat and went to bed happily. Alois would spend the next day with his family before driving their rented wagon back to Linz.

By the first night, however, Alois was also ready to establish his special investiture of the premises. By the light of the gas lamp in their

bedroom, he could see that Klara looked in fine color, not pale at all, and when he said as much, she laughed in true merriment.

"You, too, Uncle," she said. "Your nose is very red from the sun."

"Ach," he said, "you are still calling me Uncle. It is almost ten years that we are married and still, what am I to you? Uncle Alois? Do you mean Old Uncle Alois?"

"No," she said, "we are very proud of you. Today, so much. The horses and the wagon. You did it all. And so well. Something you never did before."

"Well, I can do a lot of things you do not know. I am never so simple as you think."

"I do not think you are simple," she said, "no, that I do not think."

"Yes, you can tell me. What do you think, my little Niece?"

It was not often that she was ready to speak to him so directly, but on this night, an exceptional night after all, she said, "I wonder why you never tell me that you love me."

"Maybe," he replied, "it is because you still call me 'Uncle.'"

To his astonishment, her answer was the nearest she had ever come to speaking in a manner that most certainly belonged to other kinds of women. "Maybe I call you Uncle," she said, "because you are such a big, healthy fellow of an Uncle."

This was not about to pass him by. The Hound was straining instantly at the leash. "How would you know what is the size of a healthy fellow?" he asked.

"I do not know. But I am free to guess. You are a very big Uncle."

That was what made her pregnant. He was excited enough to take her by the side of the bed, both of them standing, half-dressed, and then he took her again in bed. He was full of love—for himself, first, and his prowess—such a fine power at his age. Then, he felt a degree of love for her—plus a good deal of love for the farm. It was a beautiful piece of land. He even took pleasure in the notion of coming a little closer to his children, which is to say, he had an image of working along with them in the fields, doing what, he hardly could say, he was about to fall asleep and thought instead of summer bees searching the meadows. He was unusually delighted with how

much power had been in his loins. To have it all there on this night, just when he had begun to wonder.

He even held Klara in his arms, which was seldom his habit, and when he woke up to honor the alarms of his bladder, he almost kicked over the chamber pot. In the dark, what with his unfamiliarity with a new bedroom, he was stumbling around, and Klara was giggling. Then, she wrapped her arms around him as he came back to bed. "I am happy," she said. "I think this will be the place for us."

"Silence!" he growled. "Don't be a goose! One does not make silly predictions." Yes, he could feel the earth of the farm, all those nine acres to the rear and to the front of them, and felt just as superstitious as any of the peasants of his childhood. A person should not be as ready as Klara to speak out with good feelings to the empty night air. In any event, not aloud! Was the night so empty after all? Who knew what evil ears might be there to listen to you?

In the morning, she could sense his impatience to be done with the unpacking. It was obvious. He wanted to go out and walk his grounds. So, she took over the larger part of the immediate tasks while he gave the

children a tour of the barn, Adi and Edmund huddled close to him before the animal immanence of the two horses, the cow, and the prize sow that had been part of the purchase price. Those animals were huge, and the sow was close to overpowering them with her odor.

Now, Alois told Adi and Edmund to go back to the house and help their mother. That was a joke. Klara would have to milk the cow, feed the pig, and curry the horse, not to mention the hen house, but he needed to walk his lands alone. He had to make more than a few decisions. So, once again, he studied the condition of the fruit and walnut trees. When he had last seen them, there was more than a little snow on the ground, but the trees looked healthy, and the large branches, now bare, did appear to have integrity, strong, reasonably straight, not too many tortured shapes to suggest the aftermath of crazy storms when the trees were young.

In truth, he realized now, he had hardly studied the place before. Enough that the price was reasonable, and the house owned a fine view. He had had to be in a hurry—he could not expend days in travel back and forth from Linz.

All the same, he was not so much at ease with his purchase as he had anticipated. Walking the meadows and mounting the one small hill of his new domain, the land was less extensive than he remembered, no larger, really, than what it was, nine acres, a good-sized parade-field. On the other ~~hand~~, *hand, three or* ~~it was small enough to encourage him to do a little more farming than~~ *hand, three or* ~~he had anticipated. Three or~~ *four* of those acres would make a decent but manageable potato field. Should he give another acre to beets? Could he plant this year? That would be the question. He could not get going until the end of June, the beginning of July, but Alois-Junior would be back here then from Passau, his school year finished, and, yes, maybe they could take on some late plowing. ✓

All this while, his true disappointment came back to him. He must recognize—once again—that he could not cultivate his bees, not this summer. The brunt of the project would have to wait. Honey-gathering began in April and hardly lasted into September. One had to be there at the beginning. So, he must wait. All right, he would have nine months now to prepare, counting at least from the time when he would be back here again, permanently, in June, late June, and an unexpected and most unpleasant

shiver of anticipation came to him at this thought. Did he know what he was doing? That was a bad thought and he forced it back. He had been in control of his feelings since he was ten years old, and he was not preparing to let go now.

-5-

By the first of July, Klara was visibly pregnant. In seven months, assuming the baby would be born without incident, there would be a total of eight kids who had come into existence because of him, eight, if you include the three who now were gone. Of course, if he so desired, he could add a few not exactly accounted for—he had known a number of cooks and chambermaids who had managed to conceive with what might be called mixed male parentage. Yes, whenever one of them said she was pregnant, he had agreed that he could be the true father, but then, hadn't she also been with Hans and Gerhardt and Hermann and Wolf? With rare exceptions

(like Fanni) those women were not in a position to argue who was who. It was enough to give them a decent gift.

Here in Hafeld, he was face to face with the other side of such achievements. Through the heat of July, in this farm-house up on the hill, he had to look at five faces every meal, from Klara all the way down to Edmund, sixteen months old and already trying to talk. By January, there would be another child. He was used to living with peoples' faces in front of him, more new faces than most people had to encounter every day, but now, it was the same mugs all day long. He was not used to dwelling with such questions as whether Edmund, for example, had come up with a new phrase or was just gurgling out some globs of sound.

Managing the farm was another matter. He could take pleasure in Angela's work. For a twelve-year-old who had been putting cold cream on her hands ever since she was eight—a little city girl, ready to be spoiled—she was now, to his surprise, decent help. She was always currying the two horses, and washing down the cow even when that hefty lady didn't need another bath. She would also get Adolf and Edmund to laugh at the hearty contentment to be heard in the full-gutted sound of the sow every time they

approached with food. Rosig (Pinky) was large for a pig, large even for a prize pig, and seemed happy in her smelly wallow with its pink rosette tacked above the stall, an old prize rosette from the summer before they bought the farm. By next summer, when all the new work wouldn't be weighing on them, and there might be time, Angela wanted to prepare Rosig again for local competition. Yes, his girl, Alois decided, was a prize herself. Angela even took pains to keep the manure of the farm animals separate. She made a point of carrying each collection to a different pile. Why? Because she declared to Klara, "My father would want it that way. Nice and neat." She even succeeded in getting Adi to take up a part of the slack. While he could be counted on to throw a tantrum, Angela would ride it out. Then the boy would follow her, his nose up to heaven in horror, but nonetheless carrying a second manure pail.

His school year over, Alois-Junior arrived at the farm by the beginning of July. For a short period, no one could surpass him at work. Right off, he was splendid with the horses, particularly Ulan, a stallion five years old. Alois was proud of how quickly Junior took to the saddle. The youth was always ready for the joy of a quick canter bareback up the hill

and down, accompanied by full screams of excitement from Angela and Adi. Yet, he was also available to work the plow with the dray horse, Graubart. Before too long, they had turned up three acres of hard soil pasture for the potatoes, the same sprouting seed potatoes Klara had bought and stored in the root cellar a week after her arrival. Alois-Junior worked harder for two weeks than his father would have believed.

Then, of a sudden, this flurry of labor fell off. Bad news arrived in a letter from the school in Passau. Alois had failed half of his courses. He would have to take those studies over again.

"I won't go back," he told his father. "The teachers are so stupid that we laugh at them."

Yes, the boy must have been brooding for these two weeks over the bad school news but had not said a word, just kept working hard. In that time, they had tilled ten inches deep into the three acres chosen, a stubborn, resistant soil, after which they laid the seed potatoes in those shallow trenches and covered them lightly, each of the sprouters a foot apart, each row of furrow less than a yard away from the next, but that had been only the commencement. Now, came the labor that went into weeding and

fertilizing. Bad memories, fifty years old, came back to Alois. He now encountered white grubs and wire worms, and had to watch as the earliest potato leaves were nibbled into green lace by aphids and flea beetles. Every day one had to go back for more weeding. Soon enough, watering became an ongoing problem. One could only dig a few inches down for the irrigation canals. Go deeper and potato roots would be slashed by the shovel. These shallow trenches soon filled, however, with silt. Hours had to be spent carrying pail after pail of well water up the slope to the meadow. On one of those afternoons, Junior disappeared. He was out riding Ulan. Alois put Angela to work in his stead, and for the rest of the working day, she carried the water, heavy duty for a girl her size.

That night, Alois gave his son a tongue-lashing right in front of the others. "You are," he said, "very much like your crazy mother. Only with you, worse. You have no excuse. Your mother, by the end, was out of her mind, yes, but at least she had once been a hard worker. You are lazy." If the episode had happened even a year earlier, Alois would have given him a beating, exactly the apocalyptic variety that leaves a scar on the heart, but now the boy was big, and wild enough by the look in his eyes to offer Alois

pause. So, he did not strike him. Which, he came to decide, was a mistake. The boy's head should have been ringing from one hell of a wallop. Now, Junior might be able to think that his father could be a little afraid of him, maybe a little, yes. It was a fact that Junior kept reducing the total of his hours—a true city lad doing summer labor. Well short of sundown, he would ask Alois to let him take Ulan for a ride.

The trouble, Alois told himself, was that as a father, he was not hard enough. Under all the bite, he had a soft heart. The truth was that he adored Alois-Junior. The boy was so attractive. Restless, yes, and like his mother, victim to terrible moods. He was much too prideful, and in full flight from getting a decent education. Yet, he could be as charming as Fanni when he chose to be. He reminded Alois of how well she used to move. He even felt pride at how quickly his son had gotten on good terms with the stallion. Alois himself hesitated to ride him. It was truly a long way to the ground for a heavy man. But Alois-Junior could saddle up with all the eclat of a prize cadet—the sort who used to promenade along the best streets of Vienna wearing the boots that Alois had made for them in those years, all the way back when he had so admired such well-turned-out young men.

Memories returned of those officers strutting on the Ringstrasse with their handsome ladies, even as he, the apprentice, had dreamed of finding an elegant and lovely young milliner for himself, yes, the old dream! They would start a shop offering the finest hand-made hats and most exceptional boots, a stupid dream, but now Junior reminded him of those cadets. Such a striking young man. He was not at all like little Adolf, full of hysterical temper, or tiny Edmund, full of snots.

So, Alois could not bring himself to refuse when Alois-Junior would ask for an hour off. Ulan, after all, had to be exercised. And the horse did love his young rider. But not the father—whenever Alois approached, the beast would paw the straw of his stall, showing teeth in an unmistakably evil grin.

-6-

On one warm evening in August, Alois-Junior, took another unpleasant liberty. This time, Klara was infuriated. The youth was at table ready for their evening supper, but Angela was not. She was in the barn currying Ulan's wet hide after her brother had put the charger into a gallop on the way back from the woods and then provided too brief a walk-down to allow the animal to cool. Klara could not believe such selfish behavior. It was one of the few times in their marriage when she spoke sharply to her husband. After six pregnancies, he was no uncle to her now, not at this

moment. "You allowed your son to leave such work to Angela? That is certainly not right."

"Angela likes wiping Ulan down," said Alois-Junior. "I don't."

"I may not know horses so much," said Klara, "but I am still ready to say that he who rides one has his duty afterward. The horse sees the difference. Even if you don't."

"You know nothing about the subject," said her step-son. "When it comes to horses, you are ten degrees less than zero."

"Silence!" shouted Alois. "And keep your mouth shut for the rest of the meal. Not one word."

Coming into the fray several steps behind Klara, he had to be masterful. "Yes, silence," he repeated. "I call for it."

"Jawohl!" shouted Alois-Junior.

Now, Alois had to ask himself whether he was being mocked or obeyed? "I will repeat," said Alois. "You are to be silent for the rest of the meal. Not one word."

Alois-Junior stood up and left the table.

"Come back," said Alois, "come back, sit down, and be silent."

There was a pause, and then he did come back, but in the pause was all the suggestion of what might be yet to come.

They finished the meal without another word. Angela came in flushed from currying, started to speak, and then did not. She sat down, her face still moist from the quick wash she had taken with the dipper, and put her face to the food. Sitting next to her, Adi was so full of excitement and foreboding that he was stiff with fear he might soil himself. And Klara? She ate slowly, pausing often, her spoon in the air. She was filled with an unruly desire to upbraid her step-son again, and then—no small impulse—upbraid her own Alois as well. She said nothing, however. To interfere with two men who were in such a rage was no territory to enter. Edmund, little lip-dribbling Edmund, began to cry.

That offered a solution. Klara picked him up and left the table. Then, Alois rose and quit the room. Angela and Adi gathered the plates for washing, and Alois-Junior, continued to sit at the table, poised within his silence, gravely poised, as if he had converted his father's order into a species of reverence silently addressed to himself.

That night, Alois-Senior could not sleep and by the end of the next afternoon, he quit his labors early. For the first time in quite a while, he went to the only tavern in the area, a full mile away at Fischlham.

He had hesitated whether to go. The company was certainly less to his taste than the old beer cronies in Linz. Besides, he knew enough about farmers to anticipate the nature of his reception. He could hear certain thoughts in advance. "The peasant who tries to act like a millionaire," they would say behind his back. Or, as easily, the opposite—"this rich idiot who wants to play at being a peasant."

He had visited a couple of neighbors in January when he first looked at the house he was to buy, and had asked a few questions. They had not trusted him much. He expected that. They were not about to talk to a stranger who could choose not to buy the farm, yet might repeat enough of what he had heard to leave the owner offended by their gossip. So Alois was only told the good news, land good, just a few animals, but excellent livestock, prize sow, good orchard—yes, and walnuts, that was easy money once a year.

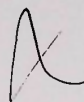
Alois had not bothered to believe them. Nor to disbelieve them. He had wanted the farm. He had assumed it could not be as good as it looked, and, of course, it wasn't. Already the big cow who had been giving fine milk every day had come down with udder trouble.

He did bring this matter up at the tavern in Flischlham. He needed to. He was looking for a few opinions on the respective merits of the veterinarians in the district, and used it as a calculated opening to stimulate the farmers into a bit of candor about other things as well. Maybe he would not be perceived forever as a retired fool. So, he listened to their guarded opinions about the local veterinarians and learned nothing he could count on. Next, he talked about his land.

When he told them that he had planted potatoes, they looked uneasy. In the most indirect manner, it did come out that he might have been wiser to consider beets.

"I planned to put in one acre like that, but not this first year. Too much at once."

They nodded. Farming and work. Yes. The oldest marriage. One must never do too much at once.



They were certainly slow-spoken. It took an hour of staring at the unadorned wooden walls of the tavern, fretting all the while over the one spike of a splinter in his behind (a gift of the dried-up wood of the tavern bench) before one of them would come forward with the muffled hint that this land on which he had planted potatoes should have been given to beets. That was because last year's crop had been wheat. Now, they spoke of a variety of wheat whose genus was unfamiliar to him, but that was what the previous owner had been planting these last three years. Who knew? The soil could now be depleted. They did not say as much; they just drew on their pipes and drank their beer and looked sad. Worst of all, as he could tell, the sadness was hardly for him, no, it was offered to the outrage done to the earth now owned by another rich man, an interloper trying to be a peasant.

The smell of the tavern became unpleasant. He could not locate the odor that mingled with the beer, but it was impure—sour milk? Old manure? A compost pile outside the door that had gone wrong? What he resented most about this quiet dun-brown wooden den was that there was not even a hint of schnapps in the air, no, not even one good town drunkard.

The evening did not prove, however, to be a loss. He learned the name of an apiculturist who lived in Hafeld. And, for further consolation, the walk home was agreeable. The late summer moon was out, full and orange, a harvest moon. He began to feel some pleasure from his beer. Tonight, those pints must have stored themselves in his stomach, ready only now to dispense some goodness. He had a long splendid urination by the side of the road.

Next morning he was back in his gathering gloom. He had to live with the disappointment of his three acres of potatoes. He would probably end with half a marketable crop. His drinking companions of last night (who in memory now smelled just like the Fischlham tavern) were right. The earth had been injured by three years of wheat. He knew as much whenever he dug up one or another early potato. And now he felt a few twinges in his gut. Was his heart acting up? Sometimes he felt as if this long-trusted organ—such a hearty companion—was forcing itself up into his brain. Yes, headaches.

Given the work yet to be done of digging up the potatoes and carting them to market in Fischlham, he ended by hiring a day laborer for the week,

a stupid fellow, yet, on balance, the man probably served up as much useful service as Junior. How was the boy going to end? Would he yet be a criminal? Alois could certainly conceive of him in something like the French Foreign Legion. Dark thoughts, but they had their appeal. When he was young, he would have made a good soldier of that variety, ready for anything. Or was that nonsense? There was something in the boy that was wilder than himself. Was that why, these days, they always had to speak to each other as if they were up on tiptoe!

The day laborer was stupid, but proved capable of putting a number of those potatoes aside for himself. Alois could not even be certain there had been a theft. Feeling not too well one afternoon, he had let the laborer take the produce to market, and the man returned with less Kronen than Alois had estimated. A little fingering at the edges. Doubtless

Then there was a miserable end to the prize sow. It died. Angela was disconsolate. Alois was amazed at how long and how hard a twelve-year-old female could cry.

It started with that big and pretty pig being grumpy. Then, day to day, it seemed worse. Angela was so upset that Alois broke into his own

reservoirs of pride and actually turned to his three nearest neighbors for advice. It was then he had to recognize that he had forgotten one of the laws of his childhood received from Johann Nepomuk before he was even ten years old. When it came to farming, there were no laws you could count on, no, not if you had the bad luck to meet an unexpected problem. Even your wisest friends could disagree on the solution. Of course. Every farmer, he now learned, had his own idea of how to cure a sick pig. Of course.

The three neighbors suggested, in turn, an emetic, a binder, and a diarrhetic. All were wrong. The sow stopped ^{began to hemorrhage,} breathing and was gone. All three had assumed the trouble could only be in the stomach or the bowels.

Where else in a pig? Who had ever heard of consumption in ^{so big a pig?} ~~such a heavy~~

~~porker?~~ Perhaps it was something else. Even the veterinarian he called in after the demise was unsure. Probably the lungs, but he would not say.

Nothing could have aggravated Alois more. To pay good money after the animal had died! Why? Because he had to know the cause. What an idiocy! He wasn't going to raise any more pigs, not now, but still he had to know. And then he found out that the veterinarian—if you could call him

that—remained no more sure of the cause than his neighbors. It would take, he told Alois, the ~~farther~~ ^{laboratory} expense of ~~lab~~ ^{they could do} tests in Linz. To hell with that!

Such an expenditure would be obscene. On top of it, he had to bury the animal whole. He was tempted, but he did not dare to carve away any good part of the meat for the family. Left to himself, Alois would have looked for some choice cuts—how much did the hams have to do, after all, with the lungs? But, no, the vet was definite. "Do not take a chance, Herr Hitler, on any part of this animal."

Yes, that is what the vet told him, but only after he had been paid! And there was Angela going on and on with her hiccups and her sobs, "Ach, ach, ach!" Not to mention his own labor of digging a hole for the carcass.

Yes, these were losses to calculate. What kind of profits could he point to from his mediocre potato crop? When he added the cost of the seed potatoes, the compost he had bought for the three acres, and then subtracted the wages of the hired hand, the loss of the sow, and the fee of the vet as well, how could he claim to have made any respectable sum? If not for the walnuts, which had, as promised, been easy money right off the ground, he would have had no profit at all.

He could reassure himself. It wasn't that he was in real financial trouble. His pension alone was six times the income of any day laborer like the poor fellow he had hired. All the same, that hardly extracted the real thorn from his gut. One of his strengths had always been his confidence that he could know at least when people were cheating him. And now he had discovered that the land he bought was nothing to brag about. Once upon a time, he might have been a peasant. Now, he might just as well call himself another town idiot, fooled on a deal involving land. Could he feel any worse if Klara took up with a farm boy? That was impossible, but then, how had it been so possible for himself, Alois Hitler, to be gulled on this deal?

By October, he was settled in gloom. Even the Hound was one sick puppy. How was he to look at himself—a man in his late middle age who dangled a wizened pup between his legs?

Klara, seven and a half months pregnant, tried to explain it to him. Now that the potato crop was in, and so much hard work was finished, it was not unnatural to feel a little unhappy. Women, she could tell him, were that way after a child was born. So much had gone into the womb, so much

hope and effort, but now one was empty again. The baby might be there and beautiful, but for a time the woman had to feel empty. For a little while. It was natural.

She had never waxed so philosophical before, not to him, but he ^{was ready to take} almost took her head off. "What am I, a woman?" he wanted to shout.

-7-

Changes occurred, however. Alois' depression lessened. Junior was no longer around. Klara had taken it upon herself to suggest that he should be sent to Spital where he could work with her father, Johann Poelzl, who by now had certainly become old enough to need a family hand. It developed that Alois-Junior was also in favor of the move. His father's depression, with all its muted threat of more despotism, lived like a fist in the midst of the son's rage.

So, it was settled. Alois' cart, driven by the hired man, would take the fourteen-year-old to Linz. Then he would travel by train to Weitra, where

he could get on a jitney that passed through Spital. The boy was gone, and a cloud of dark presentiment could lift.

In September, Adi and Angela began school in Fischlham, Angela in the fourth and most advanced grade for twelve-year-olds, Adi, at six, going to first grade.

His first school days proceeded through a bright and mellow September. The green was still on the fields. It was a fine walk hand in hand with his sister over hills and meadows. There was only one peril—a full-grown bull grazing in a fenced-in pasture. Depending on the bull's mood, they could choose to go around, or dare to cross the field. On most days, they did not dare.

Soon enough, Adi learned that it was unwise to shame Angela when she was afraid. She knew how to pay him back. She could always inform him that he smelled awful. Sometimes, it was his breath, as often, his body odor.

Probably, she did not know to what depth down into his quick-beating chest these accusations entered, but deep they went, and for good cause. They were true. He did have an odor—a touch of sulphur and an

unmistakable hint of something rotten—of that I may soon choose to speak. Such off-odor is one of the constant problems of our clients. It besets us. The Cudgels are quick to pick up such a clue.

From Angela's point of view, it was simple. Whenever Adi was teasing her, she would tell him he smelled. She did not really mind. Bad smells did not bother her. She was accustomed to sour milk and horse manure. A passing wind reeking of pig wallow from a neighboring farm even brought real sorrow to her heart—poor dead Rosig!

"What are you crying about now?" asked Adi. "You tell me how I am bad-smelling and I am the one who should cry."

"Oh, shut up. It's not you I cry for."

That meant she was thinking of Rosig and he did feel sad for her. This was not because he had liked the sow so much (in fact, he had been jealous of Angela's affection for the beast) but because he did like his older sister. She was good most of the time. Besides, she was the brightest girl inside the four walls of the one-room schoolhouse, just as he was the smartest boy.

Depending on weather and the immediate needs of the neighboring farms for additional labor, there were sometimes less than forty boys and girls, sometimes it was down to thirty, even twenty-five, but the school-room contained seating divisions for these four grades; and each child, First to Fourth, six to twelve in age, was able to listen to all that took place in every other class, a routine matter since there was only one teacher, a middle-aged lady, Fraulein Werner, who had a large nose and wore spectacles.

Adi was soon able to follow the lessons for all four classes. His introduction to German History came by way of the senior grade, the Fourth, where Angela and the others were studying the exceptional deeds of Charlemagne. An hour later, in First, Adi would be asked in company with the other beginners to decide which pictures of animals should be connected to printed words on a big card that Fraulein Werner would hold up. In the beginning, it was wondrous—all those wiggling letters that made a word. At first, the drawing vibrated in his eyes, but before long, it turned into no more than a puzzle. By the time he had reduced it to a solvable problem, he took care not to make the same mistake twice. Indeed, he soon

grew bored waiting for others in his class to catch up. Then, he could barely wait for the lessons of the Third who were studying the geography of the Hapsburg empire, the Great Hapsburg Empire, as Fraulein Werner would always say. If permitted, he would have been ready to speak out to those students who were simpletons, and could not find any of the places on the map that he had already noticed, Braunau and Linz being the first to catch his eye. Plus Passau, just across the Danube.

So, by the age of six, he was absorbing the lessons of the eight and ten and twelve-year-olds, and it pleased him that Angela was the brightest in her class. He could see the approval in Fraulein Werner's eyes each time they entered the room, but then, they were also the neatest brother and sister. That was Klara's doing, and that helped to put them up high in Fraulein Werner's favor.

His neat clothing did obliged him, however, to keep away from other boys during recess. Soon enough he had to deal with a bully one year older who kept daring him to wrestle.

"Are you crazy?" he would answer. "I am in my good clothes. My mother will kill me if I get them dirty." The daily wars of Passau had

enriched his voice with just enough assurance to deter the other. But then that boy was nothing. If Adi could manage to live with Alois-Junior, how much had he to fear from a fool like this, also named Klaus? It was big sister who bothered him with all this teasing.

-8-

Angela was concerned these days by having come into her first period. Here, Klara had done her best to allay the girl's distress. She could see that it was all connected in Angela's mind with Rosig who ^{had} hemorrhaged blood all over her hams before she died.

To bring some calm to such outraged feelings, Klara spoke for the first time of intimate matters. She adored her step-daughter. The twelve-year-old was by now her substitute for a close friend, and so she spoke not only of this new condition, but went on at good length about odor in

general, and its peculiar subtleties in nature. Odor was part of nature.

Casting about for happy examples, she presented a piece of information Alois had provided her in passing. Once, Klara had asked how he could be sure his own bees (once he started his hives) would know how to find their way home. As she understood it, he planned to acquire a couple of hive-boxes, each a full colony in itself. There they would be, sitting side by side in the shade of the big oak near the house. "How will these thousands of bees know to which box they belong?" she asked.

He was sufficiently pleased by her curiosity to explain that he would paint each of his boxes a different color, green for one, sky-blue for another, even pink, possibly, for a third. Bees, he explained, liked to return to dwellings that could be close to the color of the flowers whose nectar they brought back.

"But you tell me that each day these little creatures go to a different kind of flower. They are faithful only for this one day at a time to each variety of flower. Is that not so?"

"Yes." He wasn't certain he liked the conversation. Would he be able to answer all her questions without slipping and sliding into other matters?

"So it could be a flower of one color on one day, and another color is what they like tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"How do these bees not get mixed up?"

Yes, he was reluctant to tell her. It was not something to talk about. Not necessarily. Still, he chose to proceed. For Klara to be interested in apiculture might, on balance, be better for him than if she showed indifference. "Each queen bee has her own odor," he informed Klara. "Since she will fertilize every cell in every comb and so puts tens of thousands of eggs into separate wax cells for their beginning in life, so she is certain to pass her own odor into each of her thousands of larvae, yes, her eggs, her future children."

"That is remarkable," said Klara. "How do you know this, Alois? So much you know."

"I have read about these discoveries in books," he said grudgingly.

"You have never smelled it yourself?"

"Do I look so stupid as to put my head into a hive in order to give a dozen bees the opportunity to fly up my nose?"

She began to laugh. In certain ways, she knew him well. He might read his books on the subject, but, at bottom, he did not like to admit that he had not learned the subject by way of his hands, his feet, his strength, his five good peasant senses.

Indeed, Alois had told her a little too much. Now, she had to know more.

Before the conversation was over for this night, she actually prodded him to explain how the queen was fertilized. She was, after all, curious about any queen who could give birth to so many thousands of children and still remain a queen. There was such admiration in Alois' eye when he spoke of this. Everything depended on The Queen—the absolute success of the hive, you could say.

So Alois did choose to lead Klara through a few descriptive steps. Given her evident excitement, he could sense it would be to his advantage on this night. She was clearly full of ardor at the thought of so female a creature, so tiny, so extraordinary.

He explained then that the young queen, very much a virgin, not twenty days out of her own wax cell, (which was no larger in width and

depth than the eraser tip on the end of a new pencil) would, so soon as she emerged from that cell, be fed by Queen bee nurses and Queen bee attendants. Yet, just three weeks from that day, she would be ready to take her virgin flight out of the hive. Usually this took place on the first warm day in May. Up she would lift into the heavens, flying higher than all but a few male bees who would attempt to follow.

"The ones who are called drones?" asked Klara.

"Yes, fat, spoiled fellows. They jam their corner of the hive. They live to eat, and on a good day they fly around like fools. For the fun of it. They do not even bother to bring back honey. It is only when the virgin queen comes out for her first flight that they are able to justify their existence. On this day, they have been flying around waiting for her. They know she is coming. This Queen who flies so high, who is so beautiful compared to all her sisters, those thousands of worker bees, yes, work-horse females always looking for more nectar to bring back—those poor girls do not have full ovaries so they go out and forage, except when they are attached to other duties for the hive. Clean-up duties. Chores. But this Queen, she is different, still a virgin, she is not yet really a queen, more, I

would say, a princess. And then, I would also say, very much like a princess, she flies so high that only a few of these drones can follow. It comes down to two drones, to one, but, oh, this last strong one, he reaches her, he puts what he has, yes, you know what I mean, his very own organ which he has kept inside himself until now but suddenly it comes out, springs up, you could say, into, yes, yes, springs into—call it her vagina—why not? It is so, and she takes it all in even as they are up in the air so high, just the two of them."

"It is a wonder," said Klara. Her eyes had begun to shine. She almost said, "A miracle of love."

"No, not exactly," said Alois. At this moment, he did not know how to continue. If he said too much, he could spoil what he was looking for on this night. Still, his shrewd side was ready to speak, and he knew, yes, the best was most likely to come from telling it all.

"This drone," he said, "this one good brave drone, sticks it in so far, which is exactly what nature demands, we must suppose, that then he cannot get it back."

"What?"

"No! Donnerwetter, he can't pull out! The queen has hooks, or something of the kind, very sharp hooks, and that keeps him there. She likes him there. He is stuck. When he does insist, when he has to pull away, you won't believe it, his good organ is ripped right out of him. He is obliged to leave it behind. His manhood! Gone. All gone."

"And him? What happens then? To him?"

"Oh, he dies. He is gone. He falls to earth."

"The poor creature," she said. But she could not help it. Against her will, Klara's mouth pulled into a smirk, then slipped over to a smile. Once begun, she had to laugh. Then, she could not stop. Never before had Alois heard her laugh so long.

"What a life," she finally said, and Alois had been right to tell her. She was over six months into her pregnancy, but they made love that night. Alois had known more than one woman who could even give you a good piece of the real business in that very last week before she would pop out someone else's baby. But that had hardly been the case with Klara. On this night, however, she was different. It was equal to her best.

Of course, he certainly did not go on to tell her of two other things. The first was that the queen was perfectly capable of having other lovers after that first fabulous flight. Over the next few weeks and into June, she could have five or six more lovers. That would store more semen in her ovaries, enough to lay thousands, then tens of thousands of eggs, one each to every cell among those thousands of cells, and continue to do so until cold weather came. Then this cycle could be repeated each Spring for as much as the next three years to come. All that wealth of impregnation derived from no more than five or six copulations! This meant that for the rest of her life, the Queen would have no more to do with drones, but would be feeding honey and pollen to the pupae she had created while her court, her own worker females, followed her with devotion, capping the cells of larvae yet to emerge with a mysterious wax substance they were able to make from the pollen of the May flowers, a wax that no chemist could duplicate in the laboratory. No, he did not describe how devotedly the Queen would have to work for the rest of her life, and he certainly did not tell Klara that when mating season was done, these female worker-bees would evict the drones from the hive. When it came to dealing with the

laziest bums who would not stir, the worker-bees would sting the drones to death. (Nor did the worker bees lose their sting. The belly of a drone was that much softer than human skin.) Then, after the slaughter, the worker bees would sweep the carcasses out of the hive. Now did he speak of complications. There was always a tendency, once real warm weather began, for as much as half of the colony to be ready to swarm, that is, to fly away, desert the hive, go back to the way they used to live in the hole of a tree. You could lose your profit in a hurry. Nor did he tell her of new queens who were often extinguished by the court of bees who surrounded the Queen Bee. He left such details alone. It was better that Klara should remain sympathetic to what would be his oncoming enterprise.

Klara had not only been engrossed by what he told her that night, but now decided to use it to divert Angela from her woes. Klara, remembering her own early flow, could respect the girl's vulnerability. So, now she decided to tell Angela about the poor wrenching end of the brave drone who succeeded in reaching the Queen. This time, Klara had company in her laughter. They carried on as if they were girls of the same age or just about, and as Klara divulged more and more of what she had learned from Alois,

the topic turned not only to odor, but to the exceptional power of the Queen Bee. There she was, this creature, hardly larger than her own nursing bees and certainly smaller than any drone. Nonetheless, she had the power to impregnate the air of the hive and the thousands who dwelt within it. All of them would know their own hive since they all smelled the same. "It is," said Klara, full of a new set of giggles, "as if all Russian men and women have one kind of awful aroma, and those Polish oafs another. Maybe there is a good decent smell of tea for the English, and we Austrians, we have to be something special, we are warm like strudel." Again, she had Angela full of laughter. "And the French, yes, a shameless ugly scent. So harsh! Worse than rotten onions and old gravy. Italians—nothing but garlic." They were hugging each other by now. "Maybe the very worst, the Bohemians. I shouldn't describe them. Stinking old cabbage."

"Why not the Hungarians? Just as terrible!"

They wiped their eyes. Adi, hearing their laughter, came to join them. He was annoyed when they explained nothing, merely kept laughing at the sound of each country.

All this talk of good and bad smells gave a special tingle to Angela's nose. In school, she was now most aware of Fraulein Werner with all her talcum powder, and then there was her own little Adi. He ^{was} ~~had this~~ absolutely smelly ^{at times, especially} ~~stink~~ (when he ran up and down too many hills. She was always coaxing him to use more soap, or on those nights once a week when Klara boiled enough water for each of them to bathe in the big wash-tub, Angela would insist on lathering his back and his armpits before returning the bar of soap to him. Then, with a wholly mischievous grin—"You have the soap now, so put it where it can do some work, you careless boy."

Adi would scream with anger at such incivility, such disrespect, and loud enough for Klara to come running in. Yet he would not repeat a word to his mother. He was in a turmoil of indecision. Did he smell as bad as Angela kept saying, or was his sister crazy? Who could know? He could barely sniff a thing on himself.

Angela, however, would begin to brood once again on the death of Rosig. The prize sow had indeed been full of a strong odor, not unlike Adi at his worst, or was it Rosig at her worst?—enough! Angela began to cry for both, the boy and the pig together. Full of remorse for teasing him, she

tried to make amends by telling him a few of the wonderful secrets Klara had told her, all of this new knowledge about bees, and on many a morning as the two walked to school, she would take up the topic again—her head was so full of what she had been told that Adi's imagination was soon inflamed by the mysteries of the Queen Bee.

Ever since they had come to the farm in April, he had been most aware of the nearness of bees. In May and June, there had been hours in full daylight when the sky was full of tiny lights, pellets of light whipping about, flying in so many directions. His mother was always warning him that he must not try to touch any such tiny creature should he see one on a flower. Worse, he must never dare to kill one. That same bee could give him something to remember! Then one fine morning in July, Edmund got stung and didn't stop screaming for an hour. So Adolf, in his turn, had been most respectful of the perils of their presence.

Now, however, to hear that the Queen Bee shared her odor with every bee in the hive (and he could count by now to a thousand) yes, that did excite his thoughts.

So when he heard that his father might be going to talk to a neighbor about purchasing what Alois called "the first materials"—an announcement he made on a Saturday evening at dinner, Adi had a vivid dream that night. He saw an army of bees flying in circles above the farm. Standing near their house was an old man who was dressed differently from anyone Adi had ever seen. His shirt remained outside his pants and came to his knees, and he wore an old knit wool hat over his white hair, a hat as long as a stocking. It hung half down his back. He was not short, but he still looked like a dwarf because he was bent over. In this dream, Adi knew his name. The man was called Der Alte, and the boy woke up on Sunday morning to learn that his father was actually going to visit a bee-keeper named Der Alte.

How could he not ask his father if he could go along? Alois was surprised, then pleased. Every Sunday until now, Klara was picked up by another farm couple in their wagon to go to Sunday Mass in Fischlham's small chapel. She would travel with the three children, even as Alois stayed at the farm. "In truth, in good conscience, I cannot go," he would tell her, and he would be left alone to walk his fields. This morning, therefore, he was all the more pleased that Adi asked to join him.

I can say that I was directly instrumental in shaping the boy's dream. It had been the first active participation I had taken with the family since the night I entered Alois' mind just after his beer-soaked sermon in Linz about the beauties and wonders of apiculture.

Now, I feel that I must address the reader again on an unappetizing matter. It does concern Adi's bad smell.

-9-

It is curious, yet, after all, not so curious that few matters concerning men and women are so uncomfortable to discuss as bad odor. I will add that humans who labor for the Maestro can hardly avoid that libel.

Enough! Stinks do not make for happy devils. At this time, approaching the end of the Nineteenth Century, our problems could often be traced to one phenomenon. Many human beings in whom we invested, found it necessary to remain exceptionally fastidious in their personal habits. Otherwise, they would at varying times smell rank enough to arouse distrust. Nevertheless, these matters can only remain questions for the

How this condition began, I cannot say. My recollection of earlier eras, assuming I was a participant, is no more available to me than the memory a human might have of previous incarnations. It is probably not to the Maestro's interest to have us know any more than we need to know. Rather, we are asked to deal with problems directly before us. We do not have to call, after all, upon Judas or Bluebeard or Attila the Hun to encourage a drunken client to go for one more tot of booze. In consequence, we can have almost no definitive insight into the beginning of the war between the Dummkopf and the Evil One. Whether they were both gods or, as Milton proposed, the contest was between God and an angel as important as Lucifer—that is beyond my province. Nor can we dismiss the possibility that the Dummkopf, in early command (and disarray) of this earth and this solar system, may have been in sufficient difficulty to address Himself to higher powers out in the galaxies. It is possible that the Maestro was sent here by those greater powers because they were dissatisfied with the progress of the D.K. Evolution had already enmeshed itself in numerous cul-de-sacs. Nonetheless, these matters can only remain questions for me.

Yet, if I must offer some conjecture as to what might have taken place during the interminable eons consumed I would suppose that the D.K. is Creator of the world of weather, flora, fauna, and all human beings and evolution was His laboratory—the signs of His Folly as well as of His Genius are to be found among the myriad of His creations, and the obstacles he encountered. One need only to think of the near to measureless Time that elapsed before He could induce a few of His creatures to fly. Add to this the breadth and bulk of His earth-bound and marine species, or the godly hopes that went, for example, into the brontosaurus (only to discover that that particular over-enlarged beast happened to be simply too large to survive—that is one failure.) Leave it at that. The Creator had His relative successes and His abysmal failures. While it must be admitted that He never gave up, even if He was not always in firm control of the earth He had fashioned, it is also incontestable that earthquakes and ice ages brought many an interruption to His experiments and savaged many of His pursuits. Why? Because He had incorrectly designed this globe of earth in the first place.

Of one relatively small matter I am certain: By the time His most ambitious concept, men and women, had entered existence, there came a shift in the importance of odor. Concerning that, I believe I have at least some rudiments to offer. It is that in the long-gone era of primitive man, odor must have been one of the Creator's assets. How could He not have used its signals to aid the development of many species? In large part, animals and humans were often drawn to one another or repelled by the messages that reached the nose. So simple and elegant a solution. Presumably their smells were ready to reveal the depth of each creature's courage, perseverance, fear, treachery, shame, loyalty, and—not least—their determination to propagate. Odor enabled the D.K. to take creative steps in evolution without having to oversee each and every mating.

I think by the time our Maestro was ready to contest His progress, the Lord could no longer believe in Himself as All-Good and All-Powerful. The presence of a colleague (probably unwanted in the first place) had to reduce His sense of His own stature. So the D.K. began to search for a method whereby His Cudgels could determine which men, women, and children had gone over to the adversary. Indeed, I would propose that the

D.K. marked each of our clients with a touch of condign odor, a process chosen for its simplicity and relative lack of cost. From the Middle Ages on, therefore, our Maestro had contested this obstacle to his intentions by encouraging many of his alchemists to develop perfumes whose subtleties became a means whereby rotten odors could be topped with sweeter, earthier, more untraceable, and finally more appealing fragrances, even exotic in their hint of a bit of reek beneath the bouquet. (It is, for example, impossible to keep track of the pervasive promiscuity of court life in France during the reign of Louis XIV without pondering these royal redolences, these carnal aromas so full of camouflage. They proved a boon to all of our clients who were rich enough to afford good perfumes.)

By the end of the Enlightenment, matters had altered once more. Soaps, developed by us, were able to nullify mephitic aromas. By the twentieth century the increasing erasure of human odor contributed vitally to our progress. Soaps, bath-tubs, cleansing oils and the development of plumbing all came into being, due in large part to the support we gave to such entrepreneurs.

Toward the end of the Twentieth Century, God's dependence on unpleasant personal odor as a means of warning His Cudgels that the Evil One's clients were near, had been rendered obsolete. Deodorants dominated the day. By now, in the Twenty-First Century, it is rare to find a husband or wife who possesses much sense of the odor of their closest partner. (This is certainly true in the more developed nations.) The loss of such cognitive power has not only lessened the dominance of the D.K. but has given impetus to us.

Back, however, toward the end of the Nineteenth Century, obliteration of human odor was not nearly so complete, and the meeting between Alois, Adi, and Der Alte was characterized by a curious but immediate intimacy between the boy and the old man. In part, indeed, it was aromatic.

But
(I must not ignore ~~however~~ the walk to Der Alte's farm. On the way, Alois had a real conversation with his son for the first time.