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

escort. Der Alte was able to subdue this revolt with his cigar which he happened to be smoking at the time. He then proceeded to bury himself under his sheets. So drastic a revolt of his creatures had not visited him in years. It aroused my paranoia—always there in ready supply (for it is preferable to poor powers of anticipation.) I had to assume that this attack by the bees was a gift of the Cudgels, and so the hive had to be destroyed.

Upon receiving the order—which I passed into him as he slept—Der Alte did not fulfill the job. Not at once. A few days went by. Again, I fixed this thought into Der Alte's sleep, but now with harsh enough emphasis for him to recognize it could not be construed as a dream, but must be an imperative. All the same, our old fellow was full of dismay. "Do it," I repeated in his sleep, "it will be good for you. Tomorrow is Sunday. That will augment the good effect. Sundays provide double value. But do not employ a sulphur bomb. Too many could survive. Rather, soak the hive with kerosene. Then light it, box and all."

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

"Burn it."

Der Alte obeyed me. He had to. At his age, he knew how deeply we had infiltrated into him. He did not wish to live with the terrors we could arouse, fears as real to his flesh as an ulcer. Death was close to his thoughts, sometimes as close as a caged beast in the next room. All of this, however, left me indifferent. It is hard not to feel contempt for old clients. They are so submissive. Of course, he did it. What facilitated the act is that a good part of him was enraged at his bees. They had upset his sense of the given. Old habits can afford few shocks.

Sunday morning, he laid the hive on the ground and doused it. Staring into the commotion that seethed up in its flames, he did begin to feel better. I was on the mark. It had been good for him. But he was perspiring like a horse. He was, after all, full of woe at the incineration itself—that did violate his professional instincts. He expected to weep for all those innocents now scorched into extinction with the guilty—but to his surprise, a rare sweetness returned to his loins. This was the first such sugaring of his body he had felt in years. Like many an old man, his lust had been confined to his head. It had been a long time since any physical

accompaniment to a libidinous thought had been more agreeable than a twinge for his groin.

I will mention that Adi happened to be present at the burning. He, too, had been given a message in his sleep and had no difficulty in accepting it. He slipped away from Klara and Angela even as they were preparing to go to church. Nor did this escape bother Klara unduly. Besides, Adolf was no joy to bring along. If not squirming in his seat, he would commence a contest with his step-sister to see who could succeed in pinching the other. On the sneak.

Yes, to be alone with Angela on Sunday morning allowed her to feel a little closer to her step-daughter. If the truth be witnessed, Klara was also content not to bring Edmund along, nor to be obliged to hold Paula at her breast through the service, hoping all the while she did not wish to be fed. Today, Alois had said he would remain with the two little ones. Klara could hardly believe such generosity. Was he softening? Was that possible? That was certainly another question I might have explore. But, first, I would speak of Adi's excitement during this burning of the bees. His toes tingled, his heart shook in its chamber, he did not know whether to scream or to roar

with laughter at so thoroughgoing an auto-da-fe. The ardors of living in Russia had, however, left me a touch indolent. I did not, as yet, feel eager to re-enter the complexities of this particular six-year-old. My morale was, as I have said, in fine shape, but I did not want to set it to work so soon.

I have not mentioned this before, but during my first week in Moscow, I had been put in association with long-term resident Germans who had an unshakable (and most German) view of the Russian peasants at the railroad stations. "They are animals," I was told, "the most suspicious people in the world, and the greediest. Or, that is, they would be the greediest, except they have nothing. So their greed is like fire. It leaves nothing behind. Any one of these fellows, if he is big enough and strong enough, has a secret belief. He thinks that should it come to it, he could kill a bear with his bare hands. He would certainly try."

So, yes, on my return to these modest duties in the Linz region of Austria, I did not mind that my existence would be simpler. I would no longer be dealing with humans who were like forces of nature. Hafeld might even prove to be a welcome change, ready to offer its own revelations. At this point, I believe it was more to my taste to live with the

subtlety of small tasks. I could, for example, witness a few changes in Alois' spirit, and that, in itself, was enough to engage me.

Klara was mistaken. Alois was not softening, not exactly. He had told her it was good for him to spend a little time with the small ones every now and again, but the moment she left, he put Paula in her trundle bed, and told Edmund to stay in the room and make certain she did not wake up. Since Alois had the power to transfix a two-year-old boy into two hours of obedience, Edmund was now ready to will the infant not to awaken. Be it said, that is also a function of the will. (It is almost as great a mystery as Time.)

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

All through May, as the weather turned warm, Alois' recurring fear was that he would lose his colonies. He had a vivid picture of himself up

there, high in a tree, much too high, trying to charm a maddened swarm back into their hive. The sad fact was that, having eaten well through the winter, he felt as over-stuffed as a man who has crammed 250 pounds into a 200-pound body.

Small surprise then, if this Sunday, he was ready to let his face go slack, his stomach rumble, his sphincter break wind. There had been too many weeks through the winter and now even into the spring when he became convinced that he was going to fail at some serious activity and it would wipe out an important part of him. If such an end once seemed impossible because his vanity forbade it, that energetic vanity which he had constructed from boyhood piece by piece, episode by good episode, each attached to the previous good memory. But now--where was the confidence? He had not gone to church on this Sunday, no more than any other. Of course not, not if he could help it. Yet, he did not know if he could continue to stay away. On this particular Sunday, he had even thought of accompanying Klara. First time since they had moved to Hafeld, yes.

The thought was odious. To sit in a pew through the drive! Such an act would wipe out his sense of himself as a man who will not live in fear of disaster—a man who does not shiver as others do. But these bees had scared the hell out of him. Had this last year taken away the keystone of his pride? No one else he knew, born like himself a peasant, had ever been as ready to thumb his nose at bad omens.

Yet, just a week ago, his hands had begun to shake while holding his newspaper. There was a story about the death of a beekeeper. The man had not recovered from a crazy outbreak in his own hive.

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

Afterward, for a few days, Alois was relieved of his fear. His dread was ready to return. And he knew why. It was Alois-Junior. He had not felt right since the boy came back. He could not be such a fool, he told himself, as to live in fear of his bees because he was not at ease with his

son. Yet, that could be the truth! Human beings were full of subterfuge.

He had learned as much at Customs. He remembered a woman who wrapped her gifts in the folds of her black lingerie. A good-looking woman. When caught by Alois, she was brassy enough to smile, and say, "You are so smart. The other officers were afraid to touch these private things."

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

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

All the same, the recollection kept him brooding about the nature of subterfuge. Back in the days when he could still enjoy a ride on a horse, there had usually been one or another steed who could rob some of his confidence, something in their gait—as if, should they choose, you would find what might as well be five legs under you rather than four. You wouldn't know a damned thing about how to control that kind of animal.

Yes, that was like Alois-Junior.

On the other hand, he might be making too severe a judgment on his oldest son. Klara kept saying that Junior did not seem to be the same boy who had gone away to work for Johann Poelzl. Her parents must have been good for him. His manners were nice. He did not look to be judging you all the time. Before that, Klara said, he was like a friend who was warm to your face but would say something ugly so soon as you left. She had no proof, but she would swear that was how he used to be. Now, there was something better about him. Maybe. Before, if he had a fault, it was that he spent too much time riding Ulan. Of course, Klara also announced to Alois, she was ready to put up with that. Better to ride over the hill than to start flirting with his own sister.

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

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

She was, at least, honest enough to flush a little as she spoke. Yet, what brought the blood to her face was that she and Alois were cousins. That was a little embarrassing. But not terribly wrong. She was not aware

of the other possibility. Nor, for that matter, did Alois choose to be. He never thought of her as his daughter.

This ability to wall up the most unpalatable facts about oneself will always elicit my begrudged admiration. I do not know if the inner construction of such a barrier is equal in difficulty, let us say, to scaling the Alps, or, dealing with labyrinths. Either way, credit must go to the Dummkopf. He created the ban against incest—we certainly didn't—and then it became His secondary task to protect humans from remembering what they had done.

We lose certain advantages thereby. Most men and women are incapable of facing unpleasant truths. Their desire, dependably, is to incarcerate unseemly personal data.

We, on the contrary, look to force a breach into the ego of certain powerful people. Often, we fail. They have what can only be a God-given ability to conceal themselves from themselves. So I could appreciate how Klara was full of unadmitted worry over how to cope with Alois-Junior. As for Alois, he saw the boy's ego as impenetrable. The equal of a tycoon. And only fourteen!

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

The devils I had left behind were now pleased to tell me that they had made a copy of a short letter Johann Poelzl had sent back with Alois-Junior. It gave a definite and most decent opinion of the lad.

I could hardly trust the validity of the letter. For one thing, it was not the original but an agent's copy. That voided one of my talents—I can

obtain a good deal of insight by way of a person's handwriting. Many an undisclosed corner of the soul is revealed. Falsities stand out like acne.

As I have already indicated, these devils left behind in Hafeld were modest in performance, and so managed to do no more than study Johann's letter (left in Klara's sewing basket) and then make a copy. Possessed of more skill, they could have forged a facsimile, and kept the original.

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

Esteemed daughter,

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

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

Your father,

Johann Poelzl

I could have put in a request for one of our nocturnals in Spital to try to pass through Johann's thoughts on a milk-run, but decided to wait. He

was a stubborn old man ready to repel any entrance into his mind, and I could learn as much as I needed to know about Alois-Junior in Hafeld. The minor devils I had left here had, to my surprise, improved. Even without my surveillance, they were picking up our trade. One of them might even be ready for his first lessons in dream etching.

I will, however, not bother to describe them closely. At present, a century and more has passed, and one's former devils offer no more to the pleasure of memory than mediocre songs. Our personalities lack human characteristics, after all. While a man or woman's presence is closely related to their body, and so offers a multitude of insights, we devils are without bodies except when it is necessary to dwell within someone for a period. Then we do have a personality that is, more or less, indistinguishable from the person we inhabit, but it bears no more relation to ourselves than a change of garment.

We find a happier terrain in the land of the dream where—if we are ready to afford the expenditure—we can be anyone we wish. Some of our improvisations are brilliant. Indeed, if dreams dictated as much of human history as we desired, the Dummkopf would soon be the Maestro's retainer.

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

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

Control of events? If the Maestro was keeping alive his interest in the Hitlers of Hafeld, I looked to comprehend the motives. His avowed high hopes for this Adolf Hitler made me wonder whether I was adrift in my own spree of self-congratulation. Could I truly distinguish between the outposts and centralities of the Maestro's domain? Our special six-year-old might be one of a hundred or a thousand prospects whom the Maestro was overseeing on no more than the remote likelihood that they would yet become

important to our more serious intentions. Any estimate that my task might be of major magnitude was obliged, then, to rise and fall more than once in the immediate seasons ahead.

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

History has, however, underlined the perspicacity of the Maestro's projections into the future, and so if I return in my understanding to the summer of 1896, it is with the strength of knowing that one's work has been of significance, and many a detail that is now recalled was worthy of our attention.

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

Before long, Alois was beginning to feel a rare happiness—he so seldom liked his children. Now, he did. One of them at any rate. He even began to give Alois a few of his best lectures on beekeeping, and before long, repeated all of his earlier speeches to Klara and Angela and Adi, plus his monologues at the Linz taverns, to which he could now add the newer ones at Fischlham where he played the resident expert from Hafeld. The boy picked it up so quickly that Alois had to dip into more advanced knowledge of the sort he had ingested from reading apiary journals. Finally,

he was even presenting a few of Der Alte's finer insights as his own, as, for example, the near humanity of the bee, or the delicacy and high inspiration of their lives. The boy kept taking it in, and he was deft when working with the hives. Senior began to dream of a future where father and son might add colony to colony. This could become a true business.

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

The truth is that he was no longer uneasy over the bee-keeper's superiority. He had been enriched by the hour when Der Alte virtually wept in his arms. Now, he could face him as an equal. Besides, he had once again a practical need for advice. His hives were full of honey, and he had studied his manuals on the technique of honey-gathering, but, he did not feel ready. In the old days, back at Passau and Linz, he had made a botch of it. The honey he gathered was ridden with too much wax, and—no matter

his veil and gloves—he still received a few nasty bites where the cloth gaped on his neck and wrists.

Now, it would be more of a major effort. He could hardly sell the better part of this harvest if his product was full of detritus. One dead fly could spoil a sale if the customer saw it first!

So, here he was seeking advice again from the old goat. Yet, now, he felt more tolerant. It was amazing to Alois how little he was offended on this occasion by the aroma of the hut. Der Alte might know more about bees, but he, Alois, knew enough not to burst into tears just because something went all wrong.

He took Alois-Junior with him, therefore, and Der Alte responded to the visit with warmth. He was happy not to be alone. His convalescence heretofore had become as painful as a sharp light in the eye, and his pride had drooped under the weight of contemplating all that was missing in his life. Hermits cannot undergo excessive self-examination. It hardly matters whether they are hermits protected by the Cudgels, or in service to us, or, very occasionally, unaffiliated—although this last is a feat considering the loneliness, but in any event, such clients usually have to be taken at least

once a year through a cleansing of their all-but-dead moods. For this last week, I had had to spend time on Der Alte. His spirit had fallen before the knowledge that he could not see himself in any way as a social leader—which had been the most intense of his early ambitions. He had no mate, no heirs, no real money. And his memory kept reminding him of men or women who had done him injuries which he had failed to pay back. Under it all, was the heavy disappointment that he had not arrived at any of the powers and distinctions to which his intelligence should have entitled him. As is so often true of the depression that follows an unexpected accident, he saw this affliction as a judgment on himself.

I made a point of being present then during Alois' visit, for I wanted to improve Der Alte's mood. If a client's thoughts can be darkened by us when we wish to drive them in a desired direction, so too do we have the skill to lift a man out of a black mood for an hour or two, even—if it comes to it—provide some joy. We do not want them to expire empty. (Much better if they die young and in a rage.) Most of our old clients either cease to exist—no soul is left!—or are reincarnated by the Dummkopf who does not like to give up on any of His creatures, large or small, wise or foolish—

which may be one reason the world becomes more and more overrun by mediocrity.

The situation is, of course, never simple, since we, too, have to look to take what profit we can still extract from worn-out clients.

I was looking, therefore, to improve Der Alte's mood. Indeed, I was able to give him relief from his unhappiest thoughts so soon as Junior and Senior came to visit. I even connected him again to the notion that he was an attractive man. Vanity is always the human sentiment most available to us. Der Alte, therefore, felt powerfully attracted to Alois-Junior. It was the first time in ten or fifteen years that he had so desired to make love to an adolescent.

After the introductions and the formal query about his health, they began to discuss the procedure. "Honey-gathering! Of course! I can certainly tell you about that."

In full form, intensely aware of the boy, Der Alte felt more than ready to launch into an exposition on the lesser-known aspects of honey-gathering.

"Yes," said my rejuvenated old fellow, "honey-gathering is an art in itself. I am glad you have come to me on this day because, truly, able as your father has become in his short period here at Hafeld—a brilliant man, your father—nonetheless, the best of bee-keepers have to learn what is virtually a new vocation when, after the long winter and a kindly, warm spring that fulfills our hopes, the brood combs, having been fed their supply of honey by the good worker-bees assigned to them, are now ready to hatch. That, if I may say, is a most pregnant moment in our vocation. The hives are teeming. The old bees are out on flights and the youngsters are assigned to the innumerable tasks of housekeeping, one of which, for example, is to fill the empty wax combs with honey and cap them with a fine thin layer of wax. Specialists among the bees are assigned to do that. Young Alois, it is like a miracle. Some of these young workers are newly-born, ten days old, but already we may think of them as craftsmen. The layer of wax that covers each tiny comb has no more thickness than good stout paper."

Alois restrained himself from saying, "I know that already," and winked instead at Junior. In advance, he had told the boy to be prepared to listen. "When it comes to his bees, Der Alte can speak in full paragraphs.

Sometimes, it is full pages. All you need do is nod. I know in advance nine parts in ten of what he will say, but it is like fishing. Be patient, and you will get what you came for."

"So, yes," Der Alte now said, "the honey-gathering, if not done properly and at the right time, can be a rude interruption of the work of the bees. The first question to ask oneself, therefore, is what will be the best hour to remove your honey from the hives?" He held up a hand as if to police his own exposition. "It is the late morning," said Der Alte. "That is definitely the best time. The hives are warm but not yet too hot. The worker bees are somnolent. I would go so far as to say that your little creatures might be taking a siesta at this time. They are, after all," and he laughed, "Italian bees."

To be courteous, Alois smiled. So did Junior.

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

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

"Exactly," said Der Alte. "Your sense of anticipation is excellent. Your imagination is closely focused, I can see, on the particularities of this situation."

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

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

"Locate the Queen," said Senior. "That's one thing you taught me." He turned to Junior. "Yes, bees will panic when they do not know where their Queen is. To move them from one box to another, you have to transfer her as well."

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

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

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

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

"Just yesterday," said Der Alte, "I moved three of my queens into three separate hives. With my fingers. I could have used the catching-glass. Undeniably, it is as your father suggests, a more cautious procedure. But I am like an acrobat who has taken a serious fall. There is no solution but to get up on that verdante tightrope again."

Actually, Der Alte had gone back to the catching-glass for these transfers, but as my experienced client, he was able to offer whole assurance on any subject, even when directly removed from the facts. His desire to elicit Junior's admiration was all the impetus he needed. First, however, Alois had to be neutralized.

"Your father," he now said to Alois, "has, as usual, gone to the heart of the matter." The Queen once removed, your bees will use the separator

board to escape from the honey chamber into the brood chamber for that is where you have relocated the Queen. How they will struggle with one another in their haste to use the exit and so be able to reunite themselves with their lady."

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

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

"You must listen to your father."

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

"Yes," said Der Alte, "in the technical sense, if we speak of their gender they are female, but, of course, they are not queens, so their generative organs are undeveloped. Consequently, they act like men. Some become guards. They defend all the gates in the hive. Some are warriors.

Most of them are loyal, determined, hard-working. In that case, yes, they are like women, too. They live for the good of the hive. But they are like men when it comes to worshipping the Queen."

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

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

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

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

I went with them to hear it. I do not know if I would have interpreted the hum that entered my ears in those words. The sound was unmistakably strong. It offered the rapt, intense sound of dynamos in an electrical plant, that elevating yet fearsome hum which comes into human ears whenever one form of energy is converted to another. So much is taking place. A dominion is being directed to enter another dominion. It is the sound common to many motors. "How much we have done," these motors could be murmuring.

Der Alte's last injunction was to put the honey-chamber into a sealed box so soon as it was free of its bees. "Then you must take it indoors for the extraction. Into a good sealed room. I cannot emphasize this enough," he said directly to Alois-Junior. "As you may not yet know, these divine creatures have two natures: total loyalty to their Queen, but whole greed for the honey itself. They will gorge on it anywhere they can find it, from any and all hives. So you must not attract any bees who may be out foraging. For that reason, extraction can never be attempted in open air. I repeat: it must take place in a sealed chamber."

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Once given her instructions, Klara went to some pains by closing all the window and door sills to their kitchen with every rag at her disposal. She wore a white blouse and white apron for the occasion, and so did Angela. Alois-Senior even gave up his cigar. For the family, that was, indeed, an event. But Der Alte had warned him, "Cigar smoke does pacify our bees. But when it comes to their honey, beware. A cigar must not be allowed to insinuate itself into the taste."

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

doors, then replacing them on return. Alois complained that she was protecting everything too much—he did not think one bee had gotten into the house.

Otherwise, the task went well. As each frame was taken out of the hive-box, Alois-Senior proceeded with the pride of a surgeon. He pared the wax caps from the honey cells by way of a tool designed to lift off the thin top layer of wax that closed off each cell in the frame. Since there were two thousand cells in each of the ten frames of the Langstroth box, and a cell was no wider in diameter than the fingernail of a child, one could hardly uncap them one at a time. That might have taken a week. Instead, Alois applied the separator knife to whole patches, stripping off swatches of top wax an inch wide and from three to four inches long. To his eye, it was like a skin which he, the surgeon, had to remove, yes, no mean skill required to strip this wax without damaging the cells beneath. He was beginning to take pleasure in the job. He would have made a good surgeon, he decided. Out of the corner of his eye, he was looking to see if Alois-Junior might also be admiring his command of the procedure.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Soon, the task grew more difficult—they had to strip another layer of wax from the back side of the tray, the frames having been inserted on the vertical precisely so cells could be built on both surfaces. To remove the second coating, however, took longer. More honey was lost. Some leaked from the front, and more from the rear. Soon enough, Klara had to take over. It was soon apparent that she had the cleverest fingers of all.

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

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

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

Before long, Alois-Junior had to take over. There was silence in the kitchen as they listened to the murmur of honey dripping down the walls of the pail.

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

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

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

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

"I don't care."

"You must. Bubbles make honey uncomfortable."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They must, she told them, all work to keep their honey from becoming hard. She remembered this from her childhood. Once in a while,

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

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

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

It was as if they were drunk. All of them. In separate ways, but certainly each and every one was having an exceptionally good time. For Alois, it was as special and highly particular as good French brandy—which he had tasted three times in his life. Yes, this honey was magical. It offered memories of Fanni, splendid memories he had not permitted himself to enjoy for years. That had been true heat. What a bitch! What a witch! Too bad. She had paid a great price. To die so young. Could it not be said that she had loved him too much? The thought of such an overabundance of

love, excitement, and his old but so successful treacheries toward Anna Glassl mixed well with the taste of the honey, yes, he might just as well be drunk.

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

Alois-Junior was thinking of Der Alte. It had been in the way the old man looked at him. Eyes so moist. The old man had looked like he was ready to open his mouth and wet his lips and do the thing some of the younger boys back in Spital had done for him already. Once or twice.

Then, more than once or twice. The honey was telling him the truth. He had liked it. He had tried to get a girl to do it, but she had refused.

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

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

If the question now exists how it is possible for a devil like myself to enter the thoughts of this family when little Adolf is my only true client, I will give credit to the honey. We have among our gifts the power to invest many a substance with a trace of our presence. It takes no more. If we respect such a faculty, then that trace can, for a short period, enter the thoughts of a man or woman or child. This delicate link, carried off with

finesse, can even be maintained for a few hours. (How agreeable it would have been to offer Nicholas the Second one good taste of Alois' honey!) In any case, I suspect that was why Klara kept stirring the stuff for those several days. It was as if she wished to serve as one more guardian against my inroads.

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

Adi was the most interesting. As I anticipated, he went wild. The sweet had an effect on him equal to schnapps for Alois-Junior on an empty stomach. So Adi made a point of giving sticky kisses to Klara and Angela, delighting in their cries, and the panic with which they wiped his kisses off their mouths. Klara, particularly. To scrub her mouth was a reflex, but when she saw a hitch in Adi's laughter, as if he had been so surprised by the detestation on her face that a tear had popped up in his eye, on which she caught the boy and kissed him with all the muscular intensity of a mother doing her duty, and Adi, not knowing whether he had been rewarded or

further rebuked, crept up on Angela with a small gob on his index finger to entwine in her hair.

Angela bellowed and there was hatred in the sound. He had ripped her away from the delightful sensation cavorting through her insides. But even as Angela was catching enough breath to scold him, Adi was prancing toward Alois-Junior—who stopped him with a look.

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

Thereby, he handed Angela her quick revenge. She was there on the spot to tell Klara what had happened, and proved so precise in her description, that Klara began to scold Adi with words she had not used before, not to him. "This is a disgrace. Do you understand? It is a sin to be cruel to those who are smaller than you. How can you be so bad? God will punish you. He will punish all of us." She spoke with woe. She did not wish to spoil this splendid family occasion but must do it for the sake of

the others, for Angela, and for poor little Edmund, dirty again. "How can you play such a trick?" she said to Adi. "Edmund loves you so much."

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

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

Few primes take place without some representative of the Maestro and the D.K. in attendance. Fucking—to employ that most useful, all-but-cosmopolitan, and near-onomatopoetic word—so close to the meats, slaps, and fats of the occasion—is of real interest to both sides. Much can happen, and quickly. Old habits, whose presence in the psyche had become as heavy as old sandbags once placed to bolster the trenches, can now be thrown off.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yes, he would have been perfect as a client. We would have enhanced his powers. He could have served us in so many ways. My instructions, however, were to leave him alone. The Maestro's eyes were for Adolf. I understood. It is disruptive to work with two clients in one family, and this is particularly true if they are apart in character. One devil, trying to tend to both, may be left at odds by their conflicting needs. But two separate devils overseeing two clients in one home, can be worse. Envy might stir.

So, I stayed away from Alois-Junior. Soon enough, he did succeed in charming Greta Marie Schmidt, a strapping farm girl to whom he gave rides on Ulan. Before long, he had something like the same set of keys to her private parts that Alois-Senior had had with Fanni when she was still a virgin. To use one more American vulgarism (I confess to an unseemly

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

But Der Alte was so ready to serve himself up. So how was he, Junior, to respect Senior? All that awful, endless, nervousness about his bees? Always seeking advice from Der Alte. Now that the family had had

its honey-feast, here was his father worrying already about when to extract the rest of the product from the remaining two hives.

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

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

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

The boy felt as if he had been pulled inside-out by the power of his father's voice. It came with all the thud of a blow. Adolescents can lose all sense of themselves when an unfamiliar punishment suddenly assaults them. That is because they are not only full of airs, poses, and witless shows of

temperament, but, worse—at bottom, they do not possess a real age. In that instant, Junior ceased to be a youth of fourteen. Till then, he had seen himself as "Fourteen," a clear concept, stark in its outlines. But, like many another adolescent, he possessed the calculations of a twenty-year-old, while other corners of himself were as prone to self-betrayal as an eight-year-old caught in some foolishness. Like leaving a hive in the sun. At this moment, he actually felt full of tears.

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

He could hear the sound of his voice, sliding off every grip that he might keep on some semblance of manhood. So shrill! "You must forgive me, father. My mistake is an outrage. I cannot apologize sufficiently."

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

He took hold of Junior's chin. His eyes would not let go of the boy's eyes. He pinched him on the chin, his thumb and forefinger as direct as the claws of a pliers. But the pain rallied the boy. Der Alte had more respect for him, Alois-Junior, than for this man, Alois-Senior, who happened to be pinching him on the chin. The thought came into his eyes and remained in his expression. But by the time it was over, Alois-Senior had to recognize that the altercation had taken a good deal from him. Alois-Junior had even dared to glare back.

If this bothered his sense of himself as a father, more was soon to come. Now, it was Klara. She had received a letter from her mother that devastated all the uncertain confidence Klara had given earlier to her

father's letter. So soon as she read her mother's words, she wondered how she could have thought for an instant that Junior had changed.

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

"Klara, I tell you," she now wrote, "I have to worry. What have we sent to you? Junior is wild. So wild, Klara, and we send him back to you. Had to, yes. Now, Johann must hire another man for help. The new one is a drunk. We pay wages to a drunk. That is how much we lose by sending Junior back, but, Klara, this no-good drunk is better than Junior. We are not so afraid any more."

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

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

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

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

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

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

She was infuriated. She could not sleep. There might as well have been a bug wandering in the bedclothes. If Alois was not ready to scold his son, she would have to. But she could hardly be ready for this. It was his son, after all.

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

The occasion was simple enough. His girl, Greta Marie, had shown him a little more that afternoon of what she was at bottom—a dull cow. So, the need for new endeavor was in his fingertips. Something new. Having felt like smacking Greta Marie around, he now moved close to Angela. His sister was clucking again over her chickens, collecting each egg from each hen as if it were a gold ingot—plain, dirty, hen-stained eggs. So, he took one out of her basket. Just to hear her scream. But when she did, he was ready to break the egg on her head. Only, he could not. She was his full sister—who else did he have? So he put the egg back. Nonetheless, this act

cost too much. Yet here now was Adi, beside him, slunk up within reach, smelly little hyena. Right after coming back from his gallop with Ulan, he had seen Adi lying on the floor of their barn, screeching away, one more temper tantrum.

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

"Try and make me," said Adi.

Alois-Junior knew that the kid would go yowling to his mother. He always did. Adi had a mother—whereas he didn't. He had to put up with the brat, therefore. It was a truce.

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

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

Adolf yowled. It was as if he had anticipated just this species of showdown. Now, all on his own, he proceeded immediately to squeeze his gummed-up hair long enough to coat his palm with some of the spattered

yolk. Then he wiped it on his shirt. When it did not leave a large enough stain, Adolf lifted another egg from Angela's basket—out came a yip from her!—and broke that all over his own head, face, and shirt, after which he caterwauled as loudly as if Alois-Junior had kicked him in the shins. Then he ran from the barn to his mother. Vast screams, loud as catastrophe itself, could be heard.

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

stopped crying on the instant, nodded formally, and strode away. He did not know where the world would take him, nor when, but he understood that he would not remain in Hafeld. He could not. Not for long. He must soon say goodbye to everyone and to everything here, especially to his horse. Or should he steal him?

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

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

He was waiting for bed. Lately, Klara had begun to remove his bee-stings and he was able to enjoy that. She was so adept. She never pulled the stingers out clumsily. She was careful. So he did not have to suffer the small fury of barbs left under his skin through the night. Done poorly, it

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

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

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

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

A silence. It was followed by a deeper silence.

"I will try," she said at last.

Her instinct was to reduce this space between them. If she didn't, the difference would increase. But could she believe that her husband was

right? Young Alois was behaving like Fanni. Only ten times worse than Fanni could ever have tried to be. Yet, was it possible? Had she left a curse?

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

Now, at the dinner table, his silences weighed on them. No member of the family crossed him these days, not even Alois-Senior, but then, despite himself, he could feel sympathy for this son. He understood one side of young Alois so well. Riding Ulan, the boy must feel as handsome as an officer squiring an elegant lady on one of the better streets of Vienna. But, Alois also knew what was hatching beneath. If, at present, the horse came first, soon, it would be all about girls. The father knew this as well as if sperm was stirring in his own good equipment. The power of those first

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

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

teeming with risk. To offer your closest thoughts to others was to ask them to betray your counsel.

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

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

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

Alois lay in bed, drenched in perspiration. His son's drama unfolded before him with the power of a tragedy. He would have said to young Alois, "Do not take for granted the father of any girl you have had in the straw. Never insult a peasant who has too little to think about. Ten years from now, he will find out where you are living, and he will come to your door, and he will blow your head off with a shotgun. I have heard more than one story like that."

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

One evening, over a month ago, while having his beer in the Fischlham tavern, there had been talk which he dismissed at the time as idle, a bit of prattle about a fellow who lived on the other side of the tavern a few miles further away from Hafeld. Two of the farmers in the tavern actually knew the man, and it seemed this fellow had spoken about Alois. Yes, more than once, they assured him, "He knows you, and he made it clear. He don't like you." They had laughed.

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

Indeed, it did not, until the name came back to Alois during the middle of a sleepless June night. When he got up to look out their bedroom window, he was offered a moonlit view of silver fields, and thought of how happy these fields must be to lie fallow and not have to satisfy young

potatoes grubbing down for more of the earth's riches. Alois, however, then made the mistake of looking at the full moon, and abruptly, the face of this fellow who had declared his dislike of Alois Hitler came back to him.

Good Lord! As a memento of childhood, Alois invoked such a name only when there was bad news. Good Lord! That fellow was a smuggler, yes, he had caught him in Linz one day. Yes, he could certainly remember now. The fool had been trying to take a vial of opium over into Germany. Alois could certainly recall the hatred in the man's eyes when he was caught. The vial look in his eyes had been offensive enough to tempt Alois to strike him, but such an act he considered entirely beneath himself. Certainly, he had not laid a fist on anyone while on Customs duty, not in years.

Was the full moon a mirror to one's memories? It was there before him now so clearly. He had not struck the fellow, no, but he had mocked him. "You are angry at me?" he had said. "Be angry at yourself. You are a fool. A measly test-tube of opium buried inside a leg of ham. Even my first day on duty when I was eighteen, I would have caught you. That is the kind of fool you are."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He roared at them to stop, and on the same impulse, flung them apart with his bare hands. The sound of his voice was enough. They lay on the

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

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

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

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

What mastery had been in his father's voice. What a complete command of the situation. His father had leaped at two beasts entangled in one fury, blood flying from strings of saliva, yet his father had pulled them apart. So fearlessly! Adi was now in love with his father. For a few days that gave issue to a sense of inheritance. There was a brave man's glory waiting for him when he grew up. Now, whenever Adi had an opportunity,

he would go off into the woods by himself—no small matter—but he forced himself to be as unafraid as he could manage against the weight of all the silence of these immense trees quietly muttering into the greater silence of the forest. There, shivering, Adi would work on the power of his voice. He would roar at the trees until his throat was sore.

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

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

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

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

So, it was not common for me to follow the thoughts offered and thoughts received which passed between Alois and Luther. All the same, I was at no loss to recognize that Luther knew his end was near and Alois,

willingly or not, was fully occupied in thinking of how he would dispose of the dog.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alois had six and a half years left to live, yet on this afternoon in the forest he passed a junction on the road to death and so he wondered afterward and often whether he was a better man or a worse one because of this commitment to dispose of Luther in person, and take the pains to bury him carefully afterward.

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

He had had a variety of insect bites from his second trip to the woods with pick and shovel to dig a grave for Luther. It had taken a while, therefore, to salve the bites and remove the stingers. By the time she completed her ministrations, they were both ready to make love. While she

had no basis of comparison, she was ready nonetheless to think that there might not be another man of Alois' age, only one year shy of sixty, who was so vigorous, this Uncle Alois, her man, a good man.

They had an agreeable few nights. Alois was experiencing what can only be called a transformation. He was loving her. That can occur in a marriage. Often, it is necessary. That is because most husbands and wives use the major part of their time together in excrementitious exchanges. Indeed, that is why they married in the first place. As the Maestro presents it, they needed to be able to exercise this petty cruelty at any moment to a dependable person who was close at hand. This was certainly the case when they were terrified of the rest of the world, but even the worst marriage allowed one species of magic. The fierce upbraidings one would have liked to present to the world (but did not dare), could now be delivered through critical judgments on one's mate. All that spiritual excrement! In marriage, it is there to be traded back and forth, a practice which mediocre participants find much more to their need than trying to contain it fecklessly inside.

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

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

This was not the occasion here. The shift in attitude was of their choice, and it caught me by surprise. Intoxicated by the full moon and the June air that came up at night from the fields, Alois lay beside her in a state of trust—he knew her fingers would make no painful mistake as she took care of removing each stinger—there were so many more of them these days given this lush late spring, but she was deft, she was purposeful, and he was at peace lying beside her. For this little while. Klara was a presence he had never been able to know—a mother hovering over him.

Night after night, their ritual took place. He even became so careless on occasion as to work without the veil. He was not seeking to be stung, he

had, after all, acquired the skill to make fewer mistakes. Still, it is fair to say he did suffer a few needless attacks, but they enabled her fingers to play their delicate movements on his brow, the cheeks of his face, the meat of his hands.

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

What a notion! Up to the moment he had this thought, he had been enjoying some decent sleep. It came from the knowledge that full-chested Spartaner was out there below occupying a new dog-house built for him on the day after Luther's death. That had been no small task, but necessary. Not only was a guard dog entitled to his own sense of shelter, especially in a new habitat, but Alois' handiwork had established close feelings between the hound and himself.

New ideas, however, are too full of paradox. So, Alois twisted in the premise that guilt might be real. It gave too much dignity to all the weaklings who huddled in churches. They walked around with a stone in their stomachs and a bigger one up their ass. But now, he couldn't scorn them any longer. For he had committed incest. If he had made love to all three of his step-sisters, that was not incest, no, not unless their father was his father. But had he not known that Johann Nepomuk was his father? Of course, he had always known it although he had chosen not to. It had been the sort of thought he had always managed to chase to the rear of his mind. Now it had come to the forefront. If Klara was not the daughter of Johann Poelzl, then she had to be his child ("Sie ist hier!") That was a fact as sharp as the knife that had gone into Luther. What if there was a God who knew about things like this?

In common with most humans, however, he had the mental force to sweep his worst thoughts away. He was hardly ready to relinquish the soulful pleasures present each night in the wake of the needles removed from his flesh.

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

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

Junior and Angela. Was there something unworthy going on in that quarter? He did not like the tone of the conflict that was developing between the boy and the girl over who could or should ride Ulan.

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

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

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

"I am not."

"You are. Admit it."

"No. It is simple," she said, "I do not want to get up on Ulan. What for? If I learn, and am good at it, what then? You will still keep the horse to yourself. I will have to beg for rides."

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

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

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

"I am not."

"Yes, that is it."

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

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

"Oh, yes, you are very funny. But if I die, what will you care? You have girls all over the place. I hear about them. You are always kissing them, and then they kiss you back. But I am thirteen years old this week and I have never been kissed. So, I don't want to die before I even know what it is like." Now, she did burst into tears.

Alois-Senior overheard this conversation. As he approached the barn, he was in time to witness young Alois' reaction. The boy was unable to stop laughing.

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

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

Over the next few days, Alois-Senior tried to observe Angela closely. But, he had spent too many years putting people ill-at-ease through the intensity of his gaze. No surprise, then, if Angela was unsettled by her father's attention. She began to wonder why he was interested in her. At school, she had heard such stories. One girl had even been doing things with her father. Or so it was whispered. Ugh, disgusting, thought Angela, so very disgusting.

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

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

Klara had no such concerns about Angela. It was Alois-Junior who offended her most. Since they could not send the boy back to the Poelzl farm, they must do something with him here. After all, she had learned one simple lesson from life. It was that most situations were not comfortable. So, a poor solution to a problem could sometimes prove better than no solution. She had learned as much from her father and mother. If the Poelzl children kept dying, her parents had managed at least to love the few who were left.

While she could not even bring herself to like Alois-Junior, and no solution was in sight, still she must decide upon one. Her husband was not going to plant potatoes again next summer. That was obvious. And putting

in beets might prove just as unsuccessful. His bees, however, had been acceptable. Perhaps they could do something in that direction.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"He will always be wild," said Alois.

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

"I must think about this."

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

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

Alois went back to his books. Over the next couple of afternoons, he dredged up some of the history, culture and ancient traditions of apiculture from the several tomes he had collected on the subject, and soon decided that he would give a small lecture to the family. It would be designed for Junior, of course. Something like his expatiations in the taverns of Linz and Fischlham, but better, worthy of Der Alte.

He would tell Junior about the endless strife between bees and bears in the Middle Ages. That, decided Alois, would make a good story. Give the family a taste of such culture. He would even list all the lands where the

bear and the bee struggled with one another. He actually memorized a few of the Latin terms. Selenarctos thibetanus for the Asiatic black bear. And Ursus arctos—the brown grizzly bear of Europe and America. Helaretos Malanus, the Malaysian sun bear. He decided to content himself with these three names. They would be enough. Too much memorization could wear you out. It was better to stick to the stories he could tell. Why, even as recently as one hundred years ago, beekeepers would climb high trees to get to hives that the bears could not reach. "This was a common practice in northern Spain and in southern France," he would tell Junior. "One has to know which trees are most congenial for good nesting. I can tell you. It was alder and ash, beech and birch, and most certainly, honorable elm trees, maples as well, oak, and willows. Lime trees," he could hear himself declaring, "lime trees have always been great favorites for the bees and for us as well, even to this day. Such honey retains the finest aromatic traces of the skin of the lime. Yes," said Alois, addressing Alois-Junior in his thoughts, "this love of the bee for the lime tree goes back to the very end of the Neolithic period, close to five thousand years ago. And the bees certainly knew how to build honey-combs in those days. North of here, up

in Germany, they found one honey-comb recently, a fossil, that may have been bigger than any man who ever lived. Unbelievable. An eight-foot-long honey-comb. They found it, yes.

He was prepared to give whole funds of new information at the midday Sunday dinner. Get into the Greeks and the Romans. Since he rarely spoke at such times, as if to rebuke Klara for spending the morning in church, the meal was generally consumed under the overarching profundity of his silences, but now it was his sense that a full exposition would impress Alois-Junior, and the number of countries involved might be enough to stimulate his respect. He would have stories to tell about the Bassari in Senegal, the famine in Kilingula, the Mbuti of the Ituri forest and the honey hunters in southern Sudan.

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

Yet, when it came to deploying such erudition over the table, he decided to give the lecture up soon after he embarked on it. Perhaps he had crammed too much knowledge into himself. Klara kept nodding with approval, but whether it was for his words, or the apple strudel she had made, he could not really say, and Angela kept nodding with an expression that spoke of school-house miseries. The three younger children were half asleep, and Alois-Junior, who had shown a bit of interest, began to wilt.

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

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

Alois did not take him far from the house, but sat him down on a bench near the hives and spoke instead about the money that was there to be made by working together. "It is even possible that we could bring in Der Alte. He has made hints. He would be happy to work with us. That leads

me to believe we would have much the better of the bargain. In a few years, you could be a prosperous young man, yes, most prosperous. And let me say to you, good-looking young fellows like you are able to marry to advantage when it is seen that they are also able to make a fine living. We give it three years of hard work, and you will be sitting on top of a pretty good heap. Especially since you have a sharp sense of what is what. Believe me, you will be able to take your choice of some very good matches."

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

This sweet talk was so full of fraud. Work for his father like a slave? Not for three years. Too many good things were waiting. The moment he

was ready, he would leave them and go to Vienna. The more suddenly, the better. He had not forgiven Klara for being so rude last week. No, he would never forgive that.

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

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

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

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

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

Alois nodded profoundly in order not to show his annoyance.

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

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

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

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

"I must tell the truth. It is."

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

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

Now, Alois dipped into his best reserve of wisdom. "Son, I am prepared to let you in on a secret that will save you a few years. Maybe more. One cannot charm people for long. Not if you have nothing else to offer. People must respect you. If they do not, they will laugh with you, yes, they will sing with you, oh, yes, and then, poor boy, they will laugh

behind your back. Hard work is the only basis of a good solid exchange between two serious people. A man who tries to get by on good talk is nothing but a fiddler."

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

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

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

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

"Well, you are always getting stung."

"That happens. In this work, it will happen."

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

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

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

He had gone too far. He knew it. The fear he had been secreting was as loose by now as his temper. It had been a large mistake to speak his mind.

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

"So, I am now stupid? You are the one to speak of such a matter when you flunked out of school. And then you lied about it. What a stupidity! I have lived with this foul and rotten news for too long. I can come to only one conclusion. The answer to why you lied to us and tried to write a counterfeit letter is that you are indeed an idiot."

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

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

To be knocked down was bad enough, but to be knocked in his feet by a youth with an open gash on his face and the beginnings of a redoubtable black beard? Having observed that a few feet later, that mustache was all small talk by itself, she began to look upon Junior with the boy's eyes. His knees, whenever Alois kept punching him further over to his son lay on the ground.

When he came out of the house -13- She begged Alois to stop.

She waited. And that was just as well. For now, Junior did not move. He

lay on the ground. If young Alois had been a client, I would have convinced him not to get up. His father would have been saddled with a guilt the boy could have ridden for a year. But since I had no control in this matter, Junior rushed at Senior, grabbed his legs, and, in turn, threw him to the ground. Turn for turn. I know. Angels often fly over people who scream too loudly—they

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

And she waited. She believed Alois-Junior was dead, and his father

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

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

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

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

And Klara was vulnerable. I saw my moment. I reached her heart, I touched her thoughts. She believed Alois-Junior was dead, and his father

would spend the rest of his days in a prison. It was her fault, all her fault. She had told the father to get close to the boy even when she knew better. Since the sum of her experience had told her that the majority of one's prayers to God were not answered, she prayed now directly to us, she called upon the devil, she implored him. Only the pious can believe the devil has such powers! "Save the boy's life," she implored, "and I will be in your debt."

So we had her for the future. Not as a client. Merely attached to a bit of her soul. Unhappily, these changes are never whole and immediate. But at least, we had entrance.

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

Our most significant gain was with Adi. He had seen his father beat young Alois into the ground. He had heard his father utter a groan

remarkable for the fullness of its woe. Then as Junior began to stir, Adi saw his father stagger off into the woods, his stomach heaving and Klara's apple strudel now extruding from his nostrils. In consequence, unable to breathe, Alois felt as if he must evacuate a cannon ball from his esophagus. The midday dinner was surging up and down in his gullet.

That is time enough to spend on Alois-Senior. My attention was for Adi. The boy had voided everything, urine, feces, food. He was half out of his senses with fear that his father would return and beat his head into the ground. I could not ignore so direct an opportunity for my skills. I was ready to engrave this beating into Adi's memory. Again and again, I returned the same images to his mind, until—given his certainty that it would all be done to him as well when his father returned, I managed to brand his mind with a clear image of himself lying close to death from the beating his father had given him. He not only ached in his limbs, and his head hurt. He felt as if he had just risen from the very ground where he had been beaten down.

In later years, at the height of his power, Adolf Hitler would actually believe that he was the one who received the beating. On many a night

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

Yes, he could tell stories about his childhood to bring tears to the eyes, and pure sorrow to the hearts of all who listened. It had not come all at once, this immaculate bedrock of a lie I had fixed into those folds of the brain where memory is stored. My art was to replace a true memory by a false one and that can be equal in its exactitudes to removing an old tattoo and substituting a new one.

Moreover, this fiction would enable me to develop his future incapacity to tell the truth. By the time his political career began, he was in command of an elaborate artwork of lies ready to support even his smallest need. He could shade the truth by a hair or, equally, subvert it altogether.

Working properly on a client is, as I say, a slow process, and it took many a year to convert this particular scoring of his psyche over to a full installation. The grown man would have been ready to die in the belief that he was telling the truth when he declared that his father had almost pounded him to death. From time to time, I still took pains to reinforce the keel of this one absolute lie. It was worth it. For the Maestro often pointed to my work on this matter: "There is no better way to usurp the services of a high political leader," he would tell us, "than by this direct method. They must not be able to distinguish certain lies from the truth. They are of considerable use to us. Ideally, then, they will not even know that they are lying."

-14-

By nightfall, several events of exceptional nature were initiated by Alois-Junior and that was as soon as he realized that his father had headed off to Fischlham.

While the tavern served no drinks on Sunday, there was a house on the outskirts of town where you could buy a stein of beer in the pantry.

Alois had never visited before. It had been altogether beneath his notion of what a reputable retired official of the Crown might consider reasonable leisure activity, but this was one of the few times in his life when he had to have a drink. His knee throbbing from the first fall, his head

aching from the discharge of his rage, and his heart sore, he hobbled across the fields into the sunset and took in close to a gallon of beer.

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

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

There had been no wind that night, which certainly saved the house, but no more than ash remained of his three Langstroth boxes, nor any sign of bees except for those poor tens of thousands who had been roasted to a microscopic crisp, as well as a startling sense of gloom clinging to the walls of his home.

Klara met him. If she had been weeping, she was, by now, dry-eyed, and as crisp as the husks and butts of the hive colonies. A harsh odor arose from the last black lees of the honey.

Alois now knew a part of his wife's heart had been soured forever by the fact that on this, the worst of all nights, he had found a way to drink so much beer. He reeked of it from six feet away.

Detail by detail, she told him what had happened. The boy had ridden off on the horse, and then he had come back when they were all asleep, or pretending to be—she would admit that they were by now afraid of him. He had gathered together his clothing, tied it in a sack, attached it to the saddle of the horse and had gone off again, allowing them to breathe.

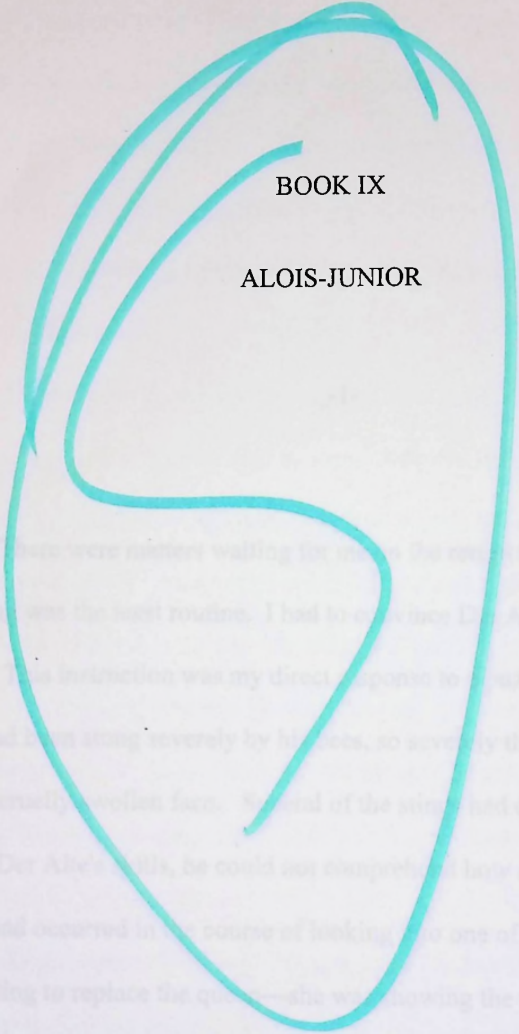
Yet, just half an hour ago, safe as they hoped themselves to be now in the beginning of sleep, Spartaner began to bay, and howled with such ferocity that she almost left her bed to investigate. But then he yelped once and made noise no more, he just whined a little—like a puppy. And the horse neighed as young Alois rode off again. A minute later, the flames had begun. She had known almost at once what was happening. Adi, as alive as a deer in flight, kept running between the house and the beehives. "He has

set them all on fire. With kerosene," cried Adi. "I know. It is like it was before." And he was laughing as much as he was weeping, not certain whether this was a terrible event or another glorious act of incineration.

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

They had even heard the last sounds of Ulan's hooves as he trotted away. Nor would the boy be back. Had he left any way for himself to return? She did not think so.

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



BOOK IX

ALOIS-JUNIOR

-1-

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

subdue this revolt with his cigar which he happened to be smoking at the time. He then proceeded to bury himself under his sheets. So drastic a revolt of his creatures had not visited him in years. It aroused my paranoia—always there in ready supply (for it is preferable to poor powers of anticipation.) I had to assume that this attack by the bees was a gift of the Cudgels, and so the hive had to be destroyed.

Upon receiving the order—which I passed into him as he slept—Der Alte did not fulfill the job. Not at once. A few days went by. Again, I fixed this thought into Der Alte's sleep, but now with harsh enough emphasis for him to recognize it could not be construed as a dream, but must be an imperative. All the same, our old fellow was full of dismay. "Do it," I repeated in his sleep, "it will be good for you. Tomorrow is Sunday. That will augment the good effect. Sundays provide double value. But do not employ a sulphur bomb. Too many could survive. Rather, soak the hive with kerosene. Then light it, box and all."

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

"Burn it."

Der Alte obeyed me. He had to. At his age, he knew how deeply we had infiltrated into him. He did not wish to live with the terrors we could arouse, fears as real to his flesh as an ulcer. Death was close to his thoughts, sometimes as close as a caged beast in the next room. All of this, however, left me indifferent. It is hard not to feel contempt for old clients. They are so submissive. Of course, he did it. What facilitated the act is that a good part of him was enraged at his bees. They had upset his sense of the given. Old habits can afford few shocks.

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

I will mention that Adi happened to be present at the burning. He, too, had been given a message in his sleep and had no difficulty in accepting it. He slipped away from Klara and Angela even as they were preparing to go to church. Nor did this escape bother Klara unduly. Besides, Adolf was no joy to bring along. If not squirming in his seat, he would commence a contest with his step-sister to see who could succeed in pinching the other. On the sneak.

Yes, to be alone with Angela on Sunday morning allowed her to feel a little closer to her step-daughter. If the truth be witnessed, Klara was also content not to bring Edmund along, nor to be obliged to hold Paula at her breast through the service, hoping all the while she did not wish to be fed. Today, Alois had said he would remain with the two little ones. Klara could hardly believe such generosity. Was he softening? Was that possible? That was certainly another question I might have explore. But, first, I would speak of Adi's excitement during this burning of the bees. His toes tingled, his heart shook in its chamber, he did not know whether to scream or to roar with laughter at so thoroughgoing an auto-da-fe. The ardors of living in Russia had, however, left me a touch indolent. I did not, as yet, feel eager to re-enter

the complexities of this particular six-year-old. My morale was, as I have said, in fine shape, but I did not want to set it to work so soon.

I have not mentioned this before, but during my first week in Moscow, I had been put in association with long-term resident Germans who had an unshakable (and most German) view of the Russian peasants at the railroad stations. "They are animals," I was told, "the most suspicious people in the world, and the greediest. Or, that is, they would be the greediest, except they have nothing. So their greed is like fire. It leaves nothing behind. Any one of these fellows, if he is big enough and strong enough, has a secret belief. He thinks that should it come to it, he could kill a bear with his bare hands. He would certainly try."

So, yes, on my return to these modest duties in the Linz region of Austria, I did not mind that my existence would be simpler. I would no longer be dealing with humans who were like forces of nature. Hafeld might even prove to be a welcome change, ready to offer its own revelations. At this point, I believe it was more to my taste to live with the subtlety of small tasks. I could, for example, witness a few changes in Alois' spirit, and that, in itself, was enough to engage me.

Klara was mistaken. Alois was not softening, not exactly. He had told her it was good for him to spend a little time with the small ones every now and again, but the moment she left, he put Paula in her trundle bed, and told Edmund to stay in the room and make certain she did not wake up. Since Alois had the power to transfix a two-year-old boy into two hours of obedience, Edmund was now ready to will the infant not to awaken. Be it said, that is also a function of the will. (It is almost as great a mystery as Time.)

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

All through May, as the weather turned warm, Alois' recurring fear was that he would lose his colonies. He had a vivid picture of himself up there, high in a tree, much too high, trying to charm a maddened swarm back into their hive. The sad fact was that, having eaten well through the winter, he felt as over-stuffed as a man who has crammed 250 pounds into a 200-pound body.

Small surprise then, if this Sunday, he was ready to let his face go slack, his stomach rumble, his sphincter break wind. There had been too many weeks through the winter and now even into the spring when he became convinced that he was going to fail at some serious activity and it would wipe out an important part of him. If such an end once seemed impossible because his vanity forbade it, that energetic vanity which he had constructed from boyhood piece by piece, episode by good episode, each attached to the previous good memory. But now--where was the confidence? He had not gone to church on this Sunday, no more than any other. Of course not, not if he could help it. Yet, he did not know if he could continue to stay away. On this particular Sunday, he had even thought of accompanying Klara. First time since they had moved to Hafeld, yes.

The thought was odious. To sit in a pew through the drivel! Such an act would wipe out his sense of himself as a man who will not live in fear of disaster—a man who does not shiver as others do. But these bees had scared the hell out of him. Had this last year taken away the keystone of his pride? No one else he knew, born like himself a peasant, had ever been as ready to thumb his nose at bad omens.

Yet, just a week ago, his hands had begun to shake while holding his newspaper. There was a story about the death of a beekeeper. The man had not recovered from a crazy outbreak in his own hive.

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

Afterward, for a few days, Alois was relieved of his fear. His dread was ready to return. And he knew why. It was Alois-Junior. He had not felt right since the boy came back. He could not be such a fool, he told himself, as to live in fear of his bees because he was not at ease with his son. Yet, that could be the truth! Human beings were full of subterfuge. He had learned as much at Customs. He remembered a woman who wrapped her gifts in the folds of her black lingerie. A good-looking woman. When caught by Alois, she was brassy enough to smile, and say, "You are so smart. The other officers were afraid to touch these private things."

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

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

All the same, the recollection kept him brooding about the nature of subterfuge. Back in the days when he could still enjoy a ride on a horse, there had usually been one or another steed who could rob some of his confidence, something in their gait—as if, should they choose, you would find what might as well be five legs under you rather than four. You wouldn't know a damned thing about how to control that kind of animal.

Yes, that was like Alois-Junior.

On the other hand, he might be making too severe a judgment on his oldest son. Klara kept saying that Junior did not seem to be the same boy who had gone away to work for Johann Poelzl. Her parents must have been good for him. His manners were nice. He did not look to be judging you all the time. Before that, Klara said, he was like a friend who was warm to your face but would say something ugly so soon as you left. She had no proof, but she

would swear that was how he used to be. Now, there was something better about him. Maybe. Before, if he had a fault, it was that he spent too much time riding Ulan. Of course, Klara also announced to Alois, she was ready to put up with that. Better to ride over the hill than to start flirting with his own sister.

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

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

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

This ability to wall up the most unpalatable facts about oneself will always elicit my begrudged admiration. I do not know if the inner construction of such a barrier is equal in difficulty, let us say, to scaling the Alps, or, dealing with labyrinths. Either way, credit must go to the Dummkopf. He created the ban against incest—we certainly didn't—and then

it became His secondary task to protect humans from remembering what they had done.

We lose certain advantages thereby. Most men and women are incapable of facing unpleasant truths. Their desire, dependably, is to incarcerate unseemly personal data.

We, on the contrary, look to force a breach into the ego of certain powerful people. Often, we fail. They have what can only be a God-given ability to conceal themselves from themselves. So I could appreciate how Klara was full of unadmitted worry over how to cope with Alois-Junior. As for Alois, he saw the boy's ego as impenetrable. The equal of a tycoon. And only fourteen!

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

The devils I had left behind were now pleased to tell me that they had made a copy of a short letter Johann Poelzl had sent back with Alois-Junior. It gave a definite and most decent opinion of the lad.

I could hardly trust the validity of the letter. For one thing, it was not the original but an agent's copy. That voided one of my talents—I can obtain a good deal of insight by way of a person's handwriting. Many an undisclosed corner of the soul is revealed. Falsities stand out like acne.

As I have already indicated, these devils left behind in Hafeld were modest in performance, and so managed to do no more than study Johann's letter (left in Klara's sewing basket) and then make a copy. Possessed of more skill, they could have forged a facsimile, and kept the original.

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

Esteemed daughter,

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

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

Your father,

Johann Poelzl

I could have put in a request for one of our nocturnals in Spital to try to pass through Johann's thoughts on a milk-run, but decided to wait. He was a stubborn old man ready to repel any entrance into his mind, and I could learn as much as I needed to know about Alois Junior in Hafeld. The minor devils I had left here had, to my surprise, improved. Even without my surveillance,

they were picking up our trade. One of them might even be ready for his first lessons in dream etching.

I will, however, not bother to describe them closely. At present, a century and more has passed, and one's former devils offer no more to the pleasure of memory than mediocre songs. Our personalities lack human characteristics, after all. While a man or woman's presence is closely related to their body, and so offers a multitude of insights, we devils are without bodies except when it is necessary to dwell within someone for a period. Then we do have a personality that is, more or less, indistinguishable from the person we inhabit, but it bears no more relation to ourselves than a change of garment.

We find a happier terrain in the land of the dream where—if we are ready to afford the expenditure—we can be anyone we wish. Some of our improvisations are brilliant. Indeed, if dreams dictated as much of human history as we desired, the Dummkopf would soon be the Maestro's retainer.

But we were nowhere near to such a point. Not by 1896. Back then, God continued to be the Lord of our immediate universe. Humans, animals, and plants were still His Creation. Nature, imperfect as it was, and on

occasion, cataclysmic (due, I must repeat, to imperfections in His design) remained nonetheless in His command, that far-from-faultless command. Only the night belonged in large part to us.

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

Control of events? If the Maestro was keeping alive his interest in the Hitlers of Hafeld, I looked to comprehend the motives. His avowed high hopes for this Adolf Hitler made me wonder whether I was adrift in my own spree of self-congratulation. Could I truly distinguish between the outposts and centralities of the Maestro's domain? Our special six-year-old might be one of a hundred or a thousand prospects whom the Maestro was overseeing on no more than the remote likelihood that they would yet become important to our more serious intentions. Any estimate that my task might be of major magnitude was obliged, then, to rise and fall more than once in the immediate seasons ahead.

I am sure, therefore, that Alois-Josef was demonstrating his considerable talent to charm whoever was in his immediate surroundings. For a time, he even succeeded in lessening the heavy suspicion that attached from Alois Rindler's parents, a mood much like a wall of oncoming bad weather. (An unsettling effect he had often used at Customs when confronting a dubious courier.) Yet, with was the boy's charm was this complication of youth, health, a touch of wit, and app- -3- - and with—that Alois would not maintain this magnetic presence for more than a few days. Moreover,

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

History has, however, underlined the perspicacity of the Maestro's projections into the future, and so if I return in my understanding to the summer of 1896, it is with the strength of knowing that one's work has been of significance, and many a detail that is now recalled was worthy of our attention.

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

Before long, Alois was beginning to feel a rare happiness—he so seldom liked his children. Now, he did. One of them at any rate. He even began to give Alois a few of his best lectures on beekeeping, and before long, repeated all of his earlier speeches to Klara and Angela and Adi, plus his monologues at the Linz taverns, to which he could now add the newer ones at Fischlham where he played the resident expert from Hafeld. The boy picked it up so quickly that Alois had to dip into more advanced knowledge of the sort he had ingested from reading apiary journals. Finally, he was even presenting

a few of Der Alte's finer insights as his own, as, for example, the near humanity of the bee, or the delicacy and high inspiration of their lives. The boy kept taking it in, and he was deft when working with the hives. Senior began to dream of a future where father and son might add colony to colony. This could become a true business.

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

The truth is that he was no longer uneasy over the bee-keeper's superiority. He had been enriched by the hour when Der Alte virtually wept in his arms. Now, he could face him as an equal. Besides, he had once again a practical need for advice. His hives were full of honey, and he had studied his manuals on the technique of honey-gathering, but, he did not feel ready. In the old days, back at Passau and Linz, he had made a botch of it. The honey he gathered was ridden with too much wax, and—no matter his veil and gloves—

he still received a few nasty bites where the cloth gaped on his neck and wrists.

Now, it would be more of a major effort. He could hardly sell the better part of this harvest if his product was full of detritus. One dead fly could spoil a sale if the customer saw it first!

So, here he was seeking advice again from the old goat. Yet, now, he felt more tolerant. It was amazing to Alois how little he was offended on this occasion by the aroma of the hut. Der Alte might know more about bees, but he, Alois, knew enough not to burst into tears just because something went all wrong.

He took Alois-Junior with him, therefore, and Der Alte responded to the visit with warmth. He was happy not to be alone. His convalescence heretofore had become as painful as a sharp light in the eye, and his pride had drooped under the weight of contemplating all that was missing in his life. Hermits cannot undergo excessive self-examination. It hardly matters whether they are hermits protected by the Cudgels, or in service to us, or, very occasionally, unaffiliated—although this last is a feat considering the loneliness, but in any event, such clients usually have to be taken at least once

a year through a cleansing of their all-but-dead moods. For this last week, I had had to spend time on Der Alte. His spirit had fallen before the knowledge that he could not see himself in any way as a social leader—which had been the most intense of his early ambitions. He had no mate, no heirs, no real money. And his memory kept reminding him of men or women who had done him injuries which he had failed to pay back. Under it all, was the heavy disappointment that he had not arrived at any of the powers and distinctions to which his intelligence should have entitled him. As is so often true of the depression that follows an unexpected accident, he saw this affliction as a judgment on himself.

I made a point of being present then during Alois' visit, for I wanted to improve Der Alte's mood. If a client's thoughts can be darkened by us when we wish to drive them in a desired direction, so too do we have the skill to lift a man out of a black mood for an hour or two, even—if it comes to it—provide some joy. We do not want them to expire empty. (Much better if they die young and in a rage.) Most of our old clients either cease to exist—no soul is left!—or are reincarnated by the Dummkopf who does not like to give up on

any of His creatures, large or small, wise or foolish—which may be one reason the world becomes more and more overrun by mediocrity.

The situation is, of course, never simple, since we, too, have to look to take what profit we can still extract from worn-out clients.

I was looking, therefore, to improve Der Alte's mood. Indeed, I was able to give him relief from his unhappiest thoughts so soon as Junior and Senior came to visit. I even connected him again to the notion that he was an attractive man. Vanity is always the human sentiment most available to us. Der Alte, therefore, felt powerfully attracted to Alois-Junior. It was the first time in ten or fifteen years that he had so desired to make love to an adolescent.

After the introductions and the formal query about his health, they began to discuss the procedure. "Honey-gathering! Of course! I can certainly tell you about that."

In full form, intensely aware of the boy, Der Alte felt more than ready to launch into an exposition on the lesser-known aspects of honey-gathering.

"Yes," said my rejuvenated old fellow, "honey-gathering is an art in itself. I am glad you have come to me on this day because, truly, able as your

father has become in his short period here at Hafeld—a brilliant man, your father—nonetheless, the best of bee-keepers have to learn what is virtually a new vocation when, after the long winter and a kindly, warm spring that fulfills our hopes, the brood combs, having been fed their supply of honey by the good worker-bees assigned to them, are now ready to hatch. That, if I may say, is a most pregnant moment in our vocation. The hives are teeming. The old bees are out on flights and the youngsters are assigned to the innumerable tasks of housekeeping, one of which, for example, is to fill the empty wax combs with honey and cap them with a fine thin layer of wax. Specialists among the bees are assigned to do that. Young Alois, it is like a miracle. Some of these young workers are newly-born, ten days old, but already we may think of them as craftsmen. The layer of wax that covers each tiny comb has no more thickness than good stout paper."

Alois restrained himself from saying, "I know that already," and winked instead at Junior. In advance, he had told the boy to be prepared to listen. "When it comes to his bees, Der Alte can speak in full paragraphs. Sometimes, it is full pages. All you need do is nod. I know in advance nine

parts in ten of what he will say, but it is like fishing. Be patient, and you will get what you came for."

"So, yes," Der Alte now said, "the honey-gathering, if not done properly and at the right time, can be a rude interruption of the work of the bees. The first question to ask oneself, therefore, is what will be the best hour to remove your honey from the hives?" He held up a hand as if to police his own exposition. "It is the late morning," said Der Alte. "That is definitely the best time. The hives are warm but not yet too hot. The worker bees are somnolent. I would go so far as to say that your little creatures might be taking a siesta at this time. They are, after all," and he laughed, "Italian bees."

To be courteous, Alois smiled. So did Junior.

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

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

"Exactly," said Der Alte. "Your sense of anticipation is excellent. Your imagination is closely focused, I can see, on the particularities of this situation."

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

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

"Locate the Queen," said Senior. "That's one thing you taught me." He turned to Junior. "Yes, bees will panic when they do not know where their Queen is. To move them from one box to another, you have to transfer her as well."

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

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

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

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

"Just yesterday," said Der Alte, "I moved three of my queens into three separate hives. With my fingers. I could have used the catching-glass. Undeniably, it is as your father suggests, a more cautious procedure. But I am like an acrobat who has taken a serious fall. There is no solution but to get up on that verdante tightrope again."

Actually, Der Alte had gone back to the catching-glass for these transfers, but as my experienced client, he was able to offer whole assurance on any subject, even when directly removed from the facts. His desire to elicit Junior's admiration was all the impetus he needed. First, however, Alois had to be neutralized.

"Your father," he now said to Alois, "has, as usual, gone to the heart of the matter." The Queen once removed, your bees will use the separator board to escape from the honey chamber into the brood chamber for that is where you have relocated the Queen. How they will struggle with one another in their haste to use the exit and so be able to reunite themselves with their lady."

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

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

"You must listen to your father."

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

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

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

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

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

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

I went with them to hear it. I do not know if I would have interpreted the hum that entered my ears in those words. The sound was unmistakably strong. It offered the rapt, intense sound of dynamos in an electrical plant, that

elevating yet fearsome hum which comes into human ears whenever one form of energy is converted to another. So much is taking place. A dominion is being directed to enter another dominion. It is the sound common to many motors. "How much we have done," these motors could be murmuring.

Der Alte's last injunction was to put the honey-chamber into a sealed box so soon as it was free of its bees. "Then you must take it indoors for the extraction. Into a good sealed room. I cannot emphasize this enough," he said directly to Alois-Junior. "As you may not yet know, these divine creatures have two natures: total loyalty to their Queen, but whole greed for the honey itself. They will gorge on it anywhere they can find it, from any and all hives. So you must not attract any bees who may be out foraging. For that reason, extraction can never be attempted in open air. I repeat: it must take place in a sealed chamber."

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Once given her instructions, Klara went to some pains by closing all the window and door sills to their kitchen with every rag at her disposal. She wore a white blouse and white apron for the occasion, and so did Angela. Alois-Senior even gave up his cigar. For the family, that was, indeed, an event. But Der Alte had warned him, "Cigar smoke does pacify our bees. But when it comes to their honey, beware. A cigar must not be allowed to insinuate itself into the taste."

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

replacing them on return. Alois complained that she was protecting everything too much—he did not think one bee had gotten into the house.

Otherwise, the task went well. As each frame was taken out of the hive-box, Alois-Senior proceeded with the pride of a surgeon. He pared the wax caps from the honey cells by way of a tool designed to lift off the thin top layer of wax that closed off each cell in the frame. Since there were two thousand cells in each of the ten frames of the Langstroth box, and a cell was no wider in diameter than the fingernail of a child, one could hardly uncap them one at a time. That might have taken a week. Instead, Alois applied the separator knife to whole patches, stripping off swatches of top wax an inch wide and from three to four inches long. To his eye, it was like a skin which he, the surgeon, had to remove, yes, no mean skill required to strip this wax without damaging the cells beneath. He was beginning to take pleasure in the job. He would have made a good surgeon, he decided. Out of the corner of his eye, he was looking to see if Alois-Junior might also be admiring his command of the procedure.

I can add that the supposition he had a talent for bodily operations had begun to warm his loins. A woman once told him that a surgeon of her

acquaintance was one of the two best lovers she had ever had. Alois was the other. How he had enjoyed the remark. Of course. He had no fear of the flesh and neither did a surgeon—brothers under the skin!

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

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

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

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

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

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

Soon, the task grew more difficult—they had to strip another layer of wax from the back side of the tray, the frames having been inserted on the vertical precisely so cells could be built on both surfaces. To remove the second coating, however, took longer. More honey was lost. Some leaked from the front, and more from the rear. Soon enough, Klara had to take over. It was soon apparent that she had the cleverest fingers of all.

This all took a few hours. As each tray was uncapped, it had to be slotted into the honey extractor, where Angela was now at work turning the crank. With devotion, she followed her father's instructions. "Yes, yes, move slowly now as you start, yes, just as you are doing it. Look inside! The honey is beginning to come out of the combs. Keep it slow, yes. Don't speed up on that crank. Not yet. Slow, Angela, slow." (He could have been driving a dray and calling to his horses.)

It proved a strain. The more slowly Angela went, the longer it took for centrifugal force to fling the honey onto the metal sides of the extractor bucket

down whose walls it would drip to a funnel. But when she sped up, too much wax flew off with the honey.

Before long, Alois-Junior had to take over. There was silence in the kitchen as they listened to the murmur of honey dripping down the walls of the pail.

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

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

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

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

"I don't care."

"You must. Bubbles make honey uncomfortable."

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

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

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

"Think of this honey," she said to Adi. "It has gone through so much. Such a great deal. It was living in one place quietly and the bees were its friends. Now, they are gone and look at all that has happened. We have been shaking it and scraping it. Then we have been spinning it. Now, the honey does not know where it is. Let it sit. We will wait. Tomorrow, we can have the party."

They said, she told them, all work to keep their honey from becoming
sour. She remembered that from her childhood. Once in a while, she
remembered a wife was one further than her husband. Why not? God gives
different gifts to everyone.

Finally, she showed the honey to be ready, and they had their party.
Alice-Sarah remembered inviting Dear Ann, but if Ann was quick to refuse such a
gesture: "This is for the family," she said.

So they each took a spoon and stood in a circle, all but Paula, who
Klara held in her arms and fed by way of her forefinger. The others looked
only apologetically. They were ready for more. Klara had baked a sponge

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

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

They must, she told them, all work to keep their honey from becoming hard. She remembered this from her childhood. Once in a while, she remarked, a wife can see farther than her husband. Why not? God gives different gifts to everyone.

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

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

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

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

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

Alois-Junior was thinking of Der Alte. It had been in the way the old man looked at him. Eyes so moist. The old man had looked like he was ready to open his mouth and wet his lips and do the thing some of the younger boys back in Spital had done for him already. Once or twice. Then, more than once

or twice. The honey was telling him the truth. He had liked it. He had tried to get a girl to do it, but she had refused.

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

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

If the question now exists how it is possible for a devil like myself to enter the thoughts of this family when little Adolf is my only true client, I will give credit to the honey. We have among our gifts the power to invest many a substance with a trace of our presence. It takes no more. If we respect such a faculty, then that trace can, for a short period, enter the thoughts of a man or woman or child. This delicate link, carried off with finesse, can even be

maintained for a few hours. (How agreeable it would have been to offer Nicholas the Second one good taste of Alois' honey!) In any case, I suspect that was why Klara kept stirring the stuff for those several days. It was as if she wished to serve as one more guardian against my inroads.

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

Adi was the most interesting. As I anticipated, he went wild. The sweet had an effect on him equal to schnapps for Alois-Junior on an empty stomach. So Adi made a point of giving sticky kisses to Klara and Angela, delighting in their cries, and the panic with which they wiped his kisses off their mouths. Klara, particularly. To scrub her mouth was a reflex, but when she saw a hitch in Adi's laughter, as if he had been so surprised by the detestation on her face that a tear had popped up in his eye, on which she caught the boy and kissed him with all the muscular intensity of a mother doing her duty, and Adi, not knowing whether he had been rewarded or further rebuked, crept up on Angela with a small gob on his index finger to entwine in her hair.

Angela bellowed and there was hatred in the sound. He had ripped her away from the delightful sensation cavorting through her insides. But even as Angela was catching enough breath to scold him, Adi was prancing toward Alois-Junior—who stopped him with a look.

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

Thereby, he handed Angela her quick revenge. She was there on the spot to tell Klara what had happened, and proved so precise in her description, that Klara began to scold Adi with words she had not used before, not to him. "This is a disgrace. Do you understand? It is a sin to be cruel to those who are smaller than you. How can you be so bad? God will punish you. He will punish all of us." She spoke with woe. She did not wish to spoil this splendid family occasion but must do it for the sake of the others, for Angela, and for poor little Edmund, dirty again. "How can you play such a trick?" she said to Adi. "Edmund loves you so much."

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

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

onomatopoetic word—so close to the meats, slaps, and fats of the occasion—is of real interest to both sides. Much can happen, and quickly. Old habits, whose presence in the psyche had become as heavy as old sandbags once placed to bolster the trenches, can now be thrown off.

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

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

The hitching post was some fifty feet away outside, but Der Alte could hear Ulan swishing his tail. He knew enough not to spend one second more in conversation, but moved over to Alois-Junior, knelt before him, laid his hand upon the boy's crotch. Whereupon—fierce Jack-in-the-box—Alois-Junior was

on his feet, pants unbuttoned, and full of a happy, blood-filled organ, thrust it at once into Der Alte's mouth—those yearning, long-unused lips.

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

That took a few minutes. He had no wish to be entangled for the most part of an hour with endearments that sat on his skin like spider webs. On the other hand, his practical nature kept him present long enough not to insult Der Alte directly. That could interfere with a return visit. Who knew? If he did

not succeed in the next few days in convincing one particular farm girl he had in mind, then back he would come to this old pot. Alois-Junior was the stuff out of which our best clients are made—at the age of fourteen, he already understood sex in a manner that was ideal for us. He would soon be adept at acquiring many a dominance by way of his priapic gifts. That, we can appreciate. So many of our clients have nondescript equipment. We never know when an erection will be there, ready to salute. That creates problems for us, although we can also manipulate whole or partial impotence into its own kind of effective instrument. For example, Adolf was to suffer prodigiously from such a condition through adolescence, war, and his early political manhood.

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

Yes, he would have been perfect as a client. We would have enhanced his powers. He could have served us in so many ways. My instructions,

however, were to leave him alone. The Maestro's eyes were for Adolf. I understood. It is disruptive to work with two clients in one family, and this is particularly true if they are apart in character. One devil, trying to tend to both, may be left at odds by their conflicting needs. But two separate devils overseeing two clients in one home, can be worse. Envy might stir.

So, I stayed away from Alois-Junior. Soon enough, he did succeed in charming Greta Marie Schmidt, a strapping farm girl to whom he gave rides on Ulan. Before long, he had something like the same set of keys to her private parts that Alois-Senior had had with Fanni when she was still a virgin. To use one more American vulgarism (I confess to an unseemly pleasure uttering them), Junior knew Greta Marie from "asshole to appetite." He had no desire to steal her virginity—that was her well-cocked trap. Moreover, he did not really like her. She was a touch too crude. So he went back to Der Alte. Despite the full-grown odors of the hut, some of those occasions were entertaining. Der Alte was full of langourous slides and inspired flutters of his tongue—all to the good for Junior, the pleasure-lover, but, of course, once done, Junior could barely look at him. The youth was just as repulsed as I was by all that sobbing and gurgling. The sad truth was that Der Alte's tongue was

preternaturally excited by the back door. Alois' buttocks began to feel like the portals to a bounteously endowed temple. He would wait until his pleasure rose high enough to be ready to explode, and then he would turn and give it all to the old boy's gullet. Afterward, he stood still as a statue again, doubly disgusted by the recognition that his father, Alois, was hopelessly in awe of Der Alte. "How well he can speak," his father had said.

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

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

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

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

The boy felt as if he had been pulled inside-out by the power of his father's voice. It came with all the thud of a blow. Adolescents can lose all sense of themselves when an unfamiliar punishment suddenly assaults them. That is because they are not only full of airs, poses, and witless shows of

temperament, but, worse—at bottom, they do not possess a real age. In that instant, Junior ceased to be a youth of fourteen. Till then, he had seen himself as "Fourteen," a clear concept, stark in its outlines. But, like many another adolescent, he possessed the calculations of a twenty-year-old, while other corners of himself were as prone to self-betrayal as an eight-year-old caught in some foolishness. Like leaving a hive in the sun. At this moment, he actually felt full of tears.

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

He could hear the sound of his voice, sliding off every grip that he might keep on some semblance of manhood. So shrill! "You must forgive me, father. My mistake is an outrage. I cannot apologize sufficiently."

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

He took hold of Junior's chin. His eyes would not let go of the boy's eyes. He pinched him on the chin, his thumb and forefinger as direct as the claws of a pliers. But the pain rallied the boy. Der Alte had more respect for him, Alois-Junior, than for this man, Alois-Senior, who happened to be pinching him on the chin. The thought came into his eyes and remained in his expression. But by the time it was over, Alois-Senior had to recognize that the altercation had taken a good deal from him. Alois-Junior had even dared to glare back.

If this bothered his sense of himself as a father, more was soon to come. Now, it was Klara. She had received a letter from her mother that devastated all the uncertain confidence Klara had given earlier to her father's letter. So

soon as she read her mother's words, she wondered how she could have thought for an instant that Junior had changed.

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

"Klara, I tell you," she now wrote, "I have to worry. What have we sent to you? Junior is wild. So wild, Klara, and we send him back to you. Had to, yes. Now, Johann must hire another man for help. The new one is a drunk. We pay wages to a drunk. That is how much we lose by sending Junior back, but, Klara, this no-good drunk is better than Junior. We are not so afraid any more."

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

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

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

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

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

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

She was infuriated. She could not sleep. There might as well have been a bug wandering in the bedclothes. If Alois was not ready to scold his son, she would have to. But she could hardly be ready for this. It was his son, after all.

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

The occasion was simple enough. His girl, Greta Marie, had shown him a little more that afternoon of what she was at bottom—a dull cow. So, the need for new endeavor was in his fingertips. Something new. Having felt like smacking Greta Marie around, he now moved close to Angela. His sister was clucking again over her chickens, collecting each egg from each hen as if it were a gold ingot—plain, dirty, hen-stained eggs. So, he took one out of her basket. Just to hear her scream. But when she did, he was ready to break the egg on her head. Only, he could not. She was his full sister—who else did he have? So he put the egg back. Nonetheless, this act cost too much. Yet here

now was Adi, beside him, slunk up within reach, smelly little hyena. Right after coming back from his gallop with Ulan, he had seen Adi lying on the floor of their barn, screeching away, one more temper tantrum.

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

"Try and make me," said Adi.

Alois-Junior knew that the kid would go yowling to his mother. He always did. Adi had a mother—whereas he didn't. He had to put up with the brat, therefore. It was a truce.

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

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

Adolf yowled. It was as if he had anticipated just this species of showdown. Now, all on his own, he proceeded immediately to squeeze his gummed-up hair long enough to coat his palm with some of the spattered yolk. Then he wiped it on his shirt. When it did not leave a large enough stain,

Adolf lifted another egg from Angela's basket—out came a yip from her!—and broke that all over his own head, face, and shirt, after which he caterwauled as loudly as if Alois-Junior had kicked him in the shins. Then he ran from the barn to his mother. Vast screams, loud as catastrophe itself, could be heard.

Klara came running back, holding Adolf by the hand, her tirade begun before she reached them. She was trying to tell Alois-Junior about the letter, but it spewed forth in no consecutive order. His lies, she told him, were worse than the filth left by pigs in a sty. "They have an excuse. They are pigs. You have nothing. You are a brute. You are a pig. You are nothing but filth." She could not believe her words. They were so strong. To her surprise, Alois-Junior actually began to sob. In all of this, he had not had until now any real idea of how ready he had been to love her, and how ready she was to dislike him right down to the depths. Yes, secretly, he had thought she really did like him, yes, more than she did his father. Now, he felt filthy. Felt filthy? To his ego, this was equal to a bereavement. He could not bear it. Just as suddenly, his sobs were choked. By his will. He stopped crying on the instant, nodded formally, and strode away. He did not know where the world would take him, nor when, but he understood that he would not remain in Hafeld. He could

not. Not for long. He must soon say goodbye to everyone and to everything here, especially to his horse. Or should he steal him?

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

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

He was waiting for bed. Lately, Klara had begun to remove his bee-stings and he was able to enjoy that. She was so adept. She never pulled the stingers out clumsily. She was careful. So he did not have to suffer the small fury of barbs left under his skin through the night. Done poorly, it could feel

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

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

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

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

A silence. It was followed by a deeper silence.

"I will try," she said at last.

Her instinct was to reduce this space between them. If she didn't, the difference would increase. But could she believe that her husband was right?

Young Alois was behaving like Fanni. Only ten times worse than Fanni could ever have tried to be. Yet, was it possible? Had she left a curse?

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

Now, at the dinner table, his silences weighed on them. No member of the family crossed him these days, not even Alois-Senior, but then, despite himself, he could feel sympathy for this son. He understood one side of young Alois so well. Riding Ulan, the boy must feel as handsome as an officer squiring an elegant lady on one of the better streets of Vienna. But, Alois also knew what was hatching beneath. If, at present, the horse came first, soon, it would be all about girls. The father knew this as well as if sperm was stirring in his own good equipment. The power of those first revelations. Nothing could be better than the moment when a woman opened her legs before you.

That first time! If you had an eye for the little differences, you knew twice as much about her as you could learn from her face. Alois-Senior would attest to that. The female organ! Whoever designed this form had certainly been sly about the job. (This was about as close as Alois ever came to admiring the Creator.) Such a wonderful array of meats and juices—such a panoply of flesh in miniature—this offering of archways and caverns and lips. Alois was certainly no philosopher, so he would not have known how to speak of Becoming (that state of existence when Being suddenly feels itself out there in the open), but all the same, he could have tipped Heidegger off. Becoming is, yes, exactly, when a woman opens her legs! Alois felt like a poet. How not? These were poetic thoughts.

Let me leave it at this: if Alois could have talked to his son, he would have had a good deal to tell him. But he would never venture to speak of these matters. Having been a guardian of the border, which is to say a policeman, he could not even trust his children. A good policeman had to live with trust as if he were handling a dangerous bottle of acid. Trust was teeming with risk. To offer your closest thoughts to others was to ask them to betray your counsel.

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

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

So he would not be so generous as to offer the root of his advice. But if he had been able to, he would have told Junior: "Enjoy every woman you can,

but always be aware of the price. Especially here in the country. Listen, young Alois," he would have said, "country people do not have enough to do with their minds. Their backs are strong, but their lives—year after year, it is the same. They are tired of being bored. So, they start to think about the wrongs that have been done to them. I say to you, son, watch out! Do not get a girl in trouble. When the time comes, do not be too certain that you will be able to deny that you are the fellow who made her pregnant. Sometimes, that does not work."

Alois lay in bed, drenched in perspiration. His son's drama unfolded before him with the power of a tragedy. He would have said to young Alois, "Do not take for granted the father of any girl you have had in the straw. Never insult a peasant who has too little to think about. Ten years from now, he will find out where you are living, and he will come to your door, and he will blow your head off with a shotgun. I have heard more than one story like that."

Since devils know to what extent men and women are able to conceal from themselves a clear view of their own motives, I soon understood that behind all this splendid advice to young Alois, the father was worried about

his own safety, yes, Alois-Senior felt as if it could be his own treasured buttocks that were exposed.

One evening, over a month ago, while having his beer in the Fischlham tavern, there had been talk which he dismissed at the time as idle, a bit of prattle about a fellow who lived on the other side of the tavern a few miles further away from Hafeld. Two of the farmers in the tavern actually knew the man, and it seemed this fellow had spoken about Alois. Yes, more than once, they assured him, "He knows you, and he made it clear. He don't like you." They had laughed.

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

Indeed, it did not, until the name came back to Alois during the middle of a sleepless June night. When he got up to look out their bedroom window, he was offered a moonlit view of silver fields, and thought of how happy these fields must be to lie fallow and not have to satisfy young potatoes grubbing down for more of the earth's riches. Alois, however, then made the mistake of looking at the full moon, and abruptly, the face of this fellow who had declared his dislike of Alois Hitler came back to him.

Good Lord! As a memento of childhood, Alois invoked such a name only when there was bad news. Good Lord! That fellow was a smuggler, yes, he had caught him in Linz one day. Yes, he could certainly remember now. The fool had been trying to take a vial of opium over into Germany. Alois could certainly recall the hatred in the man's eyes when he was caught. The vial look in his eyes had been offensive enough to tempt Alois to strike him, but such an act he considered entirely beneath himself. Certainly, he had not laid a fist on anyone while on Customs duty, not in years.

Was the full moon a mirror to one's memories? It was there before him now so clearly. He had not struck the fellow, no, but he had mocked him. "You are angry at me?" he had said. "Be angry at yourself. You are a fool. A measly test-tube of opium buried inside a leg of ham. Even my first day on duty when I was eighteen, I would have caught you. That is the kind of fool you are."

If he was going to recall it properly, could it be that the smuggler had not begun to look at him with such hatred until Alois began to jeer at him? Smugglers do not hate you for catching them—that is part of the game—but

do not mock them. How often had he said as much to young officers. "Have a little fun with them, and they will never forgive you."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He roared at them to stop, and on the same impulse, flung them apart with his bare hands. The sound of his voice was enough. They lay on the ground, half stunned, breathless, two yards apart, showing open gashes on

their noses and bloody fur at their throats. Spartaner kept panting as if the breath he needed was out there just beyond his tongue. Luther was ill within. The sum of his years had exploded. He looked at Alois with such pain, and so full an expression that Alois could all but read what he said: "I have worried about you and the safety of your house for all these years, and you yell at me as if I mean no more than that interloper you just brought in." Alois came near to petting him, and tenderly, but that would have spoiled his plans for turning Spartaner into a perfect dog.

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

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

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

What mastery had been in his father's voice. What a complete command of the situation. His father had leaped at two beasts entangled in one fury, blood flying from strings of saliva, yet his father had pulled them apart. So fearlessly! Adi was now in love with his father. For a few days that gave issue to a sense of inheritance. There was a brave man's glory waiting for him when he grew up. Now, whenever Adi had an opportunity, he would go off into the woods by himself—no small matter—but he forced himself to be as unafraid as he could manage against the weight of all the silence of these immense trees quietly muttering into the greater silence of the forest. There,

shivering, Adi would work on the power of his voice. He would roar at the trees until his throat was sore.

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

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

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

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

So, it was not common for me to follow the thoughts offered and thoughts received which passed between Alois and Luther. All the same, I was at no loss to recognize that Luther knew his end was near and Alois, willingly or not, was fully occupied in thinking of how he would dispose of the dog.

To begin with, he decided he would not shoot him. He did own a shotgun and a pistol. The first would be too messy, and the second made him uneasy. It would dishonor Luther. Yes. Pistols were reserved for malefactors.

Whether in cold blood or self-defense, such a round from a pistol was not only impersonal, but a shattering end.

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

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

Alois' thoughts were, indeed, interesting on this occasion. He had decided that the only way to dispatch his old companion Luther was by the stroke of a knife directly into his heart. Poison would never do—worse than a pistol or a shotgun—wholly treacherous and it might involve hours of pain. Alois did not know (or care that much) whether men and women had souls, but he was in no doubt about dogs. They did. Treated properly, they were the epitome of loyalty. So, in turn, one had to be loyal to the soul of one's dog,

yes. One would not blast him into the next place with the reverberations of the bullet—what a shock to the soul!—no, it would have to be the incisive stroke of a knife, fierce and clean as the heart itself in the moment its attachment to existence is severed.

Alois kept thinking these thoughts as he trudged through the woods, slowed and slowed again by the hobbling of the old hound, and soon there came a point where Luther sat down and refused to move and looked for a long time into Alois' eyes. I could swear that if he had speech at his command, he would have said, "I know you are going to kill me and that explains why I have been afraid of you all my life. Now, I am still afraid, but I will not move further. Can't you see, I am losing the last of my dignity even as you insist on taking me further and further into the woods? I can no longer control my bowels and I do not want to keep pushing my legs on and on while they are covered with this filth, so here I sit, and you will have to lift and carry me if you wish to go further."

Alois blew his nose. He could see that the dog would not move. But they had not yet come to the ground he had selected for the deed. In his mind, he had chosen a small gully one-half mile further along where he could lay the

carcass down in the bottom of the divide and cover him with mud and leaves, then branches, and finally, place a large hollowed-out branch over the body. If necessary, he would weigh it down with stones.

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

So Alois turned the sitting dog on his back, looked into his face which had sickened in the last few minutes as directly and recognizably as the face of any old creature whose liver is rushing to the grave ahead of him, a sad old face to be certain, and Alois unbuckled the flap of the sheath that held his hunting knife, laid the point of the blade at the center of the arch of Luther's rib-cage and pushed it in to the hilt. The dog's face contorted, the sound of his

expiring came out of him and it was hurtful to Alois' ear. For it was much more human than he had expected. Then, the dog's face passed through many expressions. His look settled finally into the face it would hold for the first few hours of its death before all began to decompose. Luther now looked like a young dog again, and some indefinable self-esteem had returned as if he had always been more beautiful than anyone had realized, and could have become a great warrior if it had been asked of him when he was young, yes, he did look like a warrior as his features composed into this near-final pride.

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

Alois had six and a half years left to live, yet on this afternoon in the forest he passed a junction on the road to death and so he wondered afterward and often whether he was a better man or a worse one because of this commitment to dispose of Luther in person, and take the pains to bury him carefully afterward.

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

He had had a variety of insect bites from his second trip to the woods with pick and shovel to dig a grave for Luther. It had taken a while, therefore, to salve the bites and remove the stingers. By the time she completed her ministrations, they were both ready to make love. While she had no basis of

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

They had an agreeable few nights. Alois was experiencing what can only be called a transformation. He was loving her. That can occur in a marriage. Often, it is necessary. That is because most husbands and wives use the major part of their time together in excrementitious exchanges. Indeed, that is why they married in the first place. As the Maestro presents it, they needed to be able to exercise this petty cruelty at any moment to a dependable person who was close at hand. This was certainly the case when they were terrified of the rest of the world, but even the worst marriage allowed one species of magic. The fierce upbraidings one would have liked to present to the world (but did not dare), could now be delivered through critical judgments on one's mate. All that spiritual excrement! In marriage, it is there to be traded back and forth, a practice which mediocre participants find much more to their need than trying to contain it fecklessly inside.

Ergo, marriage is a workable institution—especially for dreadful people. Yet, it can also serve men and women who may be seen as average, or slightly

better than average. Like our Klara and Alois. And strange shifts do occur. Few of these reversals are permanent, but while they last, aeration is offered to what has been an airless union.

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

This was not the occasion here. The shift in attitude was of their choice, and it caught me by surprise. Intoxicated by the full moon and the June air that came up at night from the fields, Alois lay beside her in a state of trust—he knew her fingers would make no painful mistake as she took care of removing each stinger—there were so many more of them these days given this lush late spring, but she was deft, she was purposeful, and he was at peace lying beside her. For this little while. Klara was a presence he had never been able to know—a mother hovering over him.

Night after night, their ritual took place. He even became so careless on occasion as to work without the veil. He was not seeking to be stung, he had, after all, acquired the skill to make fewer mistakes. Still, it is fair to say he did

suffer a few needless attacks, but they enabled her fingers to play their delicate movements on his brow, the cheeks of his face, the meat of his hands.

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

What a notion! Up to the moment he had this thought, he had been enjoying some decent sleep. It came from the knowledge that full-chested Spartaner was out there below occupying a new dog-house built for him on the day after Luther's death. That had been no small task, but necessary. Not only was a guard dog entitled to his own sense of shelter, especially in a new habitat, but Alois' handiwork had established close feelings between the hound and himself.

New ideas, however, are too full of paradox. So, Alois twisted in the premise that guilt might be real. It gave too much dignity to all the weaklings

who huddled in churches. They walked around with a stone in their stomachs and a bigger one up their ass. But now, he couldn't scorn them any longer. For he had committed incest. If he had made love to all three of his step-sisters, that was not incest, no, not unless their father was his father. But had he not known that Johann Nepomuk was his father? Of course, he had always known it although he had chosen not to. It had been the sort of thought he had always managed to chase to the rear of his mind. Now it had come to the forefront. If Klara was not the daughter of Johann Poelzl, then she had to be his child ("Sie ist hier!") That was a fact as sharp as the knife that had gone into Luther. What if there was a God who knew about things like this?

In common with most humans, however, he had the mental force to sweep his worst thoughts away. He was hardly ready to relinquish the soulful pleasures present each night in the wake of the needles removed from his flesh.

On these June evenings, his pains would resonate within. He did not look to divert any of his modest agonies by searching for happy thoughts. Instead, he was there, ready to accept the message that came to him from this mysterious province of pain. To Alois, it was a species of music, replete with

new sensations for the mind and heart, full of its own clarity even as it spoke to his flesh. He laid himself open to the soaring voice of each pain, as rich in amplitude as a choral group. In truth, he was exhibiting the saintliness of a sinner.

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Too little is understood about these matters. Saintliness is present in everyone, even among the worst of the worst. While I would not characterize Alois in this manner, he is looking, nonetheless, to pick up a morsel of beatitude at small cost to himself. He does not know that offering one's skin to the rhapsodies of small torture is but another means of avoiding one's fears of divine retribution. Since he has come much too near to acknowledging his incest, the upsurge of saintly sentiments was soon replaced. By morning, he was thinking like a policeman again. When an officer of the law detects a vice in himself, he knows enough to start looking for its presence in others. Soon enough, he began to worry about Alois-Junior and Angela. Was there

something unworthy going on in that quarter? He did not like the tone of the conflict that was developing between the boy and the girl over who could or should ride Ulan.

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

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

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

"I am not."

"You are. Admit it."

"No. It is simple," she said, "I do not want to get up on Ulan. What for? If I learn, and am good at it, what then? You will still keep the horse to yourself. I will have to beg for rides."

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

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

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

"I am not."

"Yes, that is it."

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

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

"Oh, yes, you are very funny. But if I die, what will you care? You have girls all over the place. I hear about them. You are always kissing them, and then they kiss you back. But I am thirteen years old this week and I have never been kissed. So, I don't want to die before I even know what it is like." Now, she did burst into tears.

Alois-Senior overheard this conversation. As he approached the barn, he was in time to witness young Alois' reaction. The boy was unable to stop laughing.

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

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

Over the next few days, Alois-Senior tried to observe Angela closely. But, he had spent too many years putting people ill-at-ease through the intensity of his gaze. No surprise, then, if Angela was unsettled by her father's attention. She began to wonder why he was interested in her. At school, she had heard such stories. One girl had even been doing things with her father. Or so it was whispered. Ugh, disgusting, thought Angela, so very disgusting.

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

This upset Alois. She was too artful at keeping her distance. He certainly did not approve of female sophistication in girls as young as Angela.

The manner, indeed, by which she drew in her hips. Where had she learned to do that?

Klara had no such concerns about Angela. It was Alois-Junior who offended her most. Since they could not send the boy back to the Poelzl farm, they must do something with him here. After all, she had learned one simple lesson from life. It was that most situations were not comfortable. So, a poor solution to a problem could sometimes prove better than no solution. She had learned as much from her father and mother. If the Poelzl children kept dying, her parents had managed at least to love the few who were left.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"He will always be wild," said Alois.

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

"I must think about this."

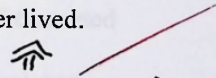
The notion did appeal to him. Hitler and Son, Apian Products. If that crybaby, Adolf, and the snot-nose Edmund ever developed, it could be Hitler and Sons.

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

Alois went back to his books. Over the next couple of afternoons, he dredged up some of the history, culture and ancient traditions of apiculture from the several tomes he had collected on the subject, and soon decided that he would give a small lecture to the family. It would be designed for Junior, of course. Something like his expatiations in the taverns of Linz and Fischlham, but better, worthy of Der Alte.

He would tell Junior about the endless strife between bees and bears in the Middle Ages. That, decided Alois, would make a good story. Give the family a taste of such culture. He would even list all the lands where the bear and the bee struggled with one another. He actually memorized a few of the Latin terms. Selenarctos thibetanus for the Asiatic black bear. And Ursus arctos—the brown grizzly bear of Europe and America. Helaretos Malanus, the Malaysian sun bear. He decided to content himself with these three names. They would be enough. Too much memorization could wear you out. It was better to stick to the stories he could tell. Why, even as recently as one

hundred years ago, beekeepers would climb high trees to get to hives that the bears could not reach. "This was a common practice in northern Spain and in southern France," he would tell Junior. "One has to know which trees are most congenial for good nesting. I can tell you. It was alder and ash, beech and birch, and most certainly, honorable elm trees, maples as well, oak, and willows. Lime trees," he could hear himself declaring, "lime trees have always been great favorites for the bees and for us as well, even to this day. Such honey retains the finest aromatic traces of the skin of the lime. Yes," said Alois, addressing Alois-Junior in his thoughts, "this love of the bee for the lime tree goes back to the very end of the Neolithic period, close to five thousand years ago. And the bees certainly knew how to build honey-combs in those days. North of here, up in Germany, they found one honey-comb recently, a fossil, that may have been bigger than any man who ever lived. Unbelievable. An eight-foot-long honey-comb. They found it, yes.



He was prepared to give whole funds of new information at the midday Sunday dinner. Get into the Greeks and the Romans. Since he rarely spoke at such times, as if to rebuke Klara for spending the morning in church, the meal was generally consumed under the overarching profundity of his silences, but

now it was his sense that a full exposition would impress Alois-Junior, and the number of countries involved might be enough to stimulate his respect. He would have stories to tell about the Bassari in Senegal, the famine in Kilingula, the Mbuti of the Ituri forest and the honey hunters in southern Sudan.

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

Yet, when it came to deploying such erudition over the table, he decided to give the lecture up soon after he embarked on it. Perhaps he had crammed too much knowledge into himself. Klara kept nodding with approval, but whether it was for his words, or the apple strudel she had made, he could not really say, and Angela kept nodding with an expression that spoke of school-house miseries. The three younger children were half asleep, and Alois-Junior, who had shown a bit of interest, began to wilt.

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

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

Alois did not take him far from the house, but sat him down on a bench near the hives and spoke instead about the money that was there to be made by working together. "It is even possible that we could bring in Der Alte. He has made hints. He would be happy to work with us. That leads me to believe we would have much the better of the bargain. In a few years, you could be a prosperous young man, yes, most prosperous. And let me say to you, good-looking young fellows like you are able to marry to advantage when it is seen that they are also able to make a fine living. We give it three years of hard work, and you will be sitting on top of a pretty good heap. Especially since you have a sharp sense of what is what. Believe me, you will be able to take your choice of some very good matches."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alois nodded profoundly in order not to show his annoyance. "Perhaps you will tell us what these gifts can be."

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

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

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

"I must tell the truth. It is."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, you are always getting stung."

"That happens. In this work, it will happen."

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

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

"Boy," he said to his son, "you are not equipped to go out in the world. You have no schooling. You have no money. And you think you will be able

to talk your way into money? That is nonsense. All you can know is how to get your farmgirls to flap their tits at you and spread their legs. Why? Maybe they believe they will get lucky and pick up a husband as lazy as themselves. Maybe they will, and then I will have to look at grandchildren as ugly as your girlfriends, and you will have to work on her father's farm."

He had gone too far. He knew it. The fear he had been secreting was as loose by now as his temper. It had been a large mistake to speak his mind.

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

"So, I am now stupid? You are the one to speak of such a matter when you flunked out of school. And then you lied about it. What a stupidity! I have lived with this foul and rotten news for too long. I can come to only one conclusion. The answer to why you lied to us and tried to write a counterfeit letter is that you are indeed an idiot."

"Yes," said Alois, Junior, "and you are different. You have beautiful children. Do you know why?" The boy's breath was coming so quickly that

his voice went up in pitch. He was all but singing his way (high-pitch) through the next words, "Yes, you find your women, you fuck them, and then you forget them. And my mother dies."

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

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

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

To be knocked down was bad enough, but to be assisted to his feet by a youth with an open pimple on his face and the beginnings of a ridiculous little

brown mustache? Having sprouted but a few lank hairs, that mustache was an insult all by itself. He began to beat upon Junior until the boy fell to his knees, whereupon Alois kept pummeling him further even as his son lay on the ground.

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

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

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

And Klara was vulnerable. I saw my moment. I reached her heart, I touched her thoughts. She believed Alois-Junior was dead, and his father would spend the rest of his days in a prison. It was her fault, all her fault. She had told the father to get close to the boy even when she knew better. Since

the sum of her experience had told her that the majority of one's prayers to God were not answered, she prayed now directly to us, she called upon the devil, she implored him. Only the pious can believe the devil has such powers! "Save the boy's life," she implored, "and I will be in your debt."

So we had her for the future. Not as a client. Merely attached to a bit of her soul. Unhappily, these changes are never whole and immediate. But at least, we had entrance.

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

Our most significant gain was with Adi. He had seen his father beat young Alois into the ground. He had heard his father utter a groan remarkable for the fullness of its woe. Then as Junior began to stir, Adi saw his father stagger off into the woods, his stomach heaving and Klara's apple strudel now extruding from his nostrils. In consequence, unable to breathe, Alois felt as if

he must evacuate a cannon ball from his esophagus. The midday dinner was surging up and down in his gullet.

That is time enough to spend on Alois-Senior. My attention was for Adi. The boy had voided everything, urine, feces, food. He was half out of his senses with fear that his father would return and beat his head into the ground. I could not ignore so direct an opportunity for my skills. I was ready to engrave this beating into Adi's memory. Again and again, I returned the same images to his mind, until—given his certainty that it would all be done to him as well when his father returned, I managed to brand his mind with a clear image of himself lying close to death from the beating his father had given him. He not only ached in his limbs, and his head hurt. He felt as if he had just risen from the very ground where he had been beaten down.

In later years, at the height of his power, Adolf Hitler would actually believe that he was the one who received the beating. On many a night during the Second World War, he would tell the tale to his secretaries and to his military adjutants as they sat at table after evening mess. He would be eloquent. "Of course, I deserved a whipping," he would say. "I gave real trouble to my father. My mother, I recall, was distraught. She loved me so,

my dear mother." He would remember himself as being just as brave as Alois-Junior, yes, he had stood up to his father. "I think that is why he had to beat me. I must have deserved it. I said terrible things to him, words so awful I cannot repeat them. Probably, I deserved this good beating. My father was a fine strong decent man, one Austrian who was a real German. Still, I do not know that a father should ever beat a son so close to death—it was too close."

Yes, he could tell stories about his childhood to bring tears to the eyes, and pure sorrow to the hearts of all who listened. It had not come all at once, this immaculate bedrock of a lie I had fixed into those folds of the brain where memory is stored. My art was to replace a true memory by a false one and that can be equal in its exactitudes to removing an old tattoo and substituting a new one.

Moreover, this fiction would enable me to develop his future incapacity to tell the truth. By the time his political career began, he was in command of an elaborate artwork of lies ready to support even his smallest need. He could shade the truth by a hair or, equally, subvert it altogether.

Working properly on a client is, as I say, a slow process, and it took many a year to convert this particular scoring of his psyche over to a full

installation. The grown man would have been ready to die in the belief that he was telling the truth when he declared that his father had almost pounded him to death. From time to time, I still took pains to reinforce the keel of this one absolute lie. It was worth it. For the Maestro often pointed to my work on this matter: "There is no better way to usurp the services of a high political leader," he would tell us, "than by this direct method. They must not be able to distinguish certain lies from the truth. They are of considerable use to us. Ideally, then, they will not even know that they are lying."

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By nightfall, several events of exceptional nature were initiated by Alois-Junior and that was as soon as he realized that his father had headed off to Fischlham.

While the tavern served no drinks on Sunday, there was a house on the outskirts of town where you could buy a stein of beer in the pantry.

Alois had never visited before. It had been altogether beneath his notion of what a reputable retired official of the Crown might consider reasonable leisure activity, but this was one of the few times in his life when he had to have a drink. His knee throbbing from the first fall, his head aching from the

discharge of his rage, and his heart sore, he hobbled across the fields into the sunset and took in close to a gallon of beer.

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

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

There had been no wind that night, which certainly saved the house, but no more than ash remained of his three Langstroth boxes, nor any sign of bees except for those poor tens of thousands who had been roasted to a microscopic crisp, as well as a startling sense of gloom clinging to the walls of his home.

Klara met him. If she had been weeping, she was, by now, dry-eyed, and as crisp as the husks and butts of the hive colonies. A harsh odor arose from the last black lees of the honey.

Alois now knew a part of his wife's heart had been soured forever by the fact that on this, the worst of all nights, he had found a way to drink so much beer. He reeked of it from six feet away.

Detail by detail, she told him what had happened. The boy had ridden off on the horse, and then he had come back when they were all asleep, or pretending to be—she would admit that they were by now afraid of him. He had gathered together his clothing, tied it in a sack, attached it to the saddle of the horse and had gone off again, allowing them to breathe.

Yet, just half an hour ago, safe as they hoped themselves to be now in the beginning of sleep, Spartaner began to bay, and howled with such ferocity that she almost left her bed to investigate. But then he yelped once and made noise no more, he just whined a little—like a puppy. And the horse neighed as young Alois rode off again. A minute later, the flames had begun. She had known almost at once what was happening. Adi, as alive as a deer in flight, kept running between the house and the beehives. "He has set them all on fire.

With kerosene," cried Adi. "I know. It is like it was before." And he was laughing as much as he was weeping, not certain whether this was a terrible event or another glorious act of incineration.

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

They had even heard the last sounds of Ulan's hooves as he trotted away. Nor would the boy be back. Had he left any way for himself to return? She did not think so.

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