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As a newborn, he was a most typical Klara Poelzl product. That is, he was close to desperately unhealthy. Indeed, he terrified Klara every time a drop of mucus oozed out of his nose or a bubble of sputum popped from his infant lips.

It is probably true that she was ready to die if he did not live. Devils are sound at anticipating motive (the more sordid, the better), but even our soundest predictions fade at the borders of mortality. We are obliged to recognize that God does have a final power to decide where and when a human being will die. Take the extreme example of an airplane that has just crashed. Let us say devils are responsible for its malfunction. Nonetheless, we do not

have the power to destroy everyone on board. Our Adversary (God) determines that result. In most such cases, He will have to accept what we succeeded in bringing off, but not always. Occasionally, He will make an exceptional effort to save a few trapped on that edge of extinction. But this is rare—airplane crashes involve too many factors. Indeed, He could not even save His Son, (as we are never tired of reminding our clients.) Still, there are occasions when a death we looked to create does not occur. From time to time, even in extreme difficulties, God still disposes.

Be it understood, then, that such mortal questions come down to the extent of the expenditure. Who will choose in each specific instance to bear the cost? Occasionally, we can make it prodigiously expensive for God to war with us. To keep this understanding alive, that He is less than All-Powerful, we try not to speak of the Lord as God, but as the D.K. What this means, will be explained before long. For that matter, we do not speak of the Evil One. Rather, we call our leader the Maestro.

Now, however, I choose to go back to Klara and her condition.

The attention she gave to Adolf's early days would have been seen as hysteria in any woman who had less cause for concern, but then, Klara was

living at the edge of the abyss. Recollections of her first illicit joining with Alois were pervaded by the penetratingly corrupt smell of the sickroom as Gustav, Ida, and Otto were lost one by one in the same few months of the same year. She had prayed devoutly to God to save each of her three babies, but the prayers were unavailing. As she saw it, God's rebuke could only confirm the sin of her condition.

By the time Adolf was born, she had formed the habit of washing her mouth every morning with laundry soap. (Alois was now full of a predilection—especially in late pregnancy—to force Klara's mouth onto the Hound and keep it there, one big hand on her neck until his release had passed through its final spurt.)

No surprise then if her love was for the baby. So soon as Adolf gave some real indication of living—after two weeks he would smile with delight at the approach of her face—she began to believe that God might be kind to her this time, that He could even be ready to forgive. Would He be ready to spare this child? Was His Wrath lessened? Had He even given her an angel? Such is the nature of pious hope. Next, she had a dream that told her to have nothing to do with her husband. Such is the nature of pious obligation.

Alois soon had to face the possibility that a will of iron, when forged by prayer, can be quite as powerful in a woman as a highly-developed biceps on a man. At first, Alois could not believe that her refusal to let him touch her was more than a whim, a new species of enticement. "You women go back and forth like a kitten chasing its tail," he told her. Then, deciding that rebellion such as this was to be mercilessly crushed, he seized her buttocks in one hand and her breast with the other.

She bit him on the wrist hard enough to draw blood. Whereupon he cuffed her, leaving Klara with a bruised eye. Gott im Himmel! He was obliged next morning to beg her not to go out until her eye was no longer discolored. For a week, his hand bandaged, he shopped for food after work—no tavern on those nights. Then, with her bruise gone at last, he still had to give up what he considered irrevocable rights, and was obliged to sleep in a huddle on his side of the bed.

Since this state would be maintained over quite a period, I choose for the present to stay closer to Klara. An intensity of emotion is always attractive to demons and devils, even as farmers dream of black soil for future crops.

It need hardly be underlined that the death of Otto, Gustav, and Ida proved useful to us even if we had not been the ones to effect it. Obviously, it intensified Klara's adoration of Adolf past any usual measure of large maternal love. When he began to scream every time she kissed his lips, she came to recognize that it was the odor of lye on her mouth. But since Alois had been driven to his side of the bed, there was no longer a need each morning to use such harsh soap. So she could kiss Adolf again even as he gurgled obligingly.

We expected that this would prove useful. Excessive mother-love is almost as promising to us as a void of mother-love. We are keyed to look for excess of every kind, good or bad, loving or hateful, too much or too little of anything. Every exaggeration of honest sentiment is there to serve our aims.

However, we would wait. When it comes to turning a child into a client, we follow a reliable rule. We move slowly. While an incestuous procreation followed by swarms of mother-love will offer rich possibilities, particularly when the event has been fortified by our presence at conception, and we have, therefore, every reason to expect exceptional potentiality to be present for us, still we wait, we observe. The child may not live. We lose so many. All too often, God is aware of our choice and, heartlessly—I will say this about

Him—yes, God can remove certain children heartlessly—no matter the cost to Himself. The cost to Himself? A curious calculation is present. The Lord is not insensitive to the hopes of those who surround the young one. The early death of an exceptional child can demoralize a family. Even when He knows, therefore, that a given individual has been in good part captured by us, He hesitates. Sometimes, He does not wish to take on the collateral damage to the family. Besides, His angels can always look to steal the child back from us.

So the D.K. is respectful of mother-love even when it is all-embracing. It can come as no surprise, then, that many artists, ogres, geniuses, killers, and an occasional savior live to maturity because God chose not to dispose of them. The first element of mutual recognition in the struggle between the D.K. (as we shall now call Him most of the time) and our leader—the Maestro—is their mutual understanding that no single splendid human quality is likely to prevail by itself, unaltered by His powers or ours. Even the noblest, most self-sacrificing and generous mother can produce a monster. Provided we are present. All the same, this is not a game where we can count on the end result. That is why investing in the newborn is an unbalanced gamble for both the Maestro and the Lord.

But I can see by now that further explanation of the conditions, limitations, and powers of the world I inhabit, must be offered its exposition or too little will be understood.

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I will attempt, then, an explanation of our Two Kingdoms. (I could speak of them as two antagonisms, two realms, two visions of existence at odds with each other, but Two Kingdoms has been the term used by us since Biblical times.) Needless to add, we devils are confronted daily by a formidable array of angels. (We call them the Cudgels)

While these warring forces will not be unfamiliar to anyone who has read "Paradise Lost," I would note that many of us are well-versed in literary classics. I cannot speak for the angels, but devils are obliged to be devoted to good writing. Milton, therefore, is high in our arcana of those few literary artists whom we do not have to look upon as unforgivably second-rate (because of their sentimental inexactitudes). Milton, after all, did provide a

rough outline of the contest between the Two Kingdoms. No matter how inaccurate were his details, he did present a pioneer demonstration of how our armies might have confronted each other at the commencement of that great estrangement which occurred when the earliest squadrons of angels divided into opposed camps, and each was convinced that they were the ones to direct the future of human beings.

One can offer respect, then, to that great blind man, even if his descriptions are out of date. Devils who serve the Maestro do not go to war in phalanx against angels any longer. Rather, we are artfully installed by now in every corner of human existence.

To bring, therefore, a first explanation of the sinuosities, salients, neuterings, and recesses of our war, I am obliged to offer an outline of the forces at play now in human society. I would start by remarking that there are three aspects to reality—the divine, the satanic, the human—in effect, three separate armies, three kingdoms, not two. God and His angelic cohort work upon men, women, and children to bring them under His sway. Our Maestro, and we, his representatives, look to possess many of these same humans. Until the Middle Ages, human beings could not bring much of an active role to the

contest. Often, they were no more than pawns. Hence the title: Two Kingdoms. By now, however, we are obliged to take the individual man or woman into account. I will even say that many, if not most, humans, are at present doing their best to be beholden neither to God nor to the Maestro. They seek to be free. They often remark (and most sententiously) "I want to discover who I am." All the while, we devils guide the people we have attracted (we call them clients), the Cudgels contest us, and many a particular individual does his or her best to fight off both of Us. Humans have become so vain (through technology) that more than a number expect by now to become independent of God and the Devil alike.

This, it can be repeated, is but a first approach to the perversities embedded in existence, a sketch of the true complexity of events.

For example, I can recover, if necessary, the concealed, even long-buried memories of a client. Such power, however, consumes Time. (Time is a word I capitalize since for us, as well as for the angels, it is a resource comparable to Money's power over humans.) We are always calculating the Time we can afford to give each of our clients. My need to acquire more insight must always be balanced, then, against the investment required at

working our will upon a particular person. For this reason, the average human is not usually of interest to us. Their powers of insight, memory, and ill intent are limited. Rather, we look to find men and women who are ready to transgress large laws whether social or divine.

Such men and women are, I fear, no longer common. Often we have to be content with mediocrities. In our Company, provided we are sufficiently patient, we can improve them. The Maestro approves of such skill. It produces promotions for oneself. I have had clients whom I was able to develop to the point where they could serve in one or another of our larger projects. The average client, however, caught in the back and forth between a guardian angel and a directing devil like myself, often end by producing little that is useful to either Kingdom, and I can certainly recall a few unhappy situations where the guardian angel who was my opposite number came away with the spoils.

At one unhappy period in the past, as a result of such losses, my position suffered. For a time, I was assigned clients of petty origin or modest achievement. I encouraged common soldiers, for instance, to injure the morale of their company by desertion, I encouraged workers and peasants who

looked to stir up revolutions, but turned corrupt. I knew a few priests in small towns who got into trouble with little boys, and more than a few estate managers who pilfered funds. I indulged petty barons and counts as they gambled away the last of old holdings, and I might as well list petty thieves, drunken louts, and unfaithful wives (of the worst sort—matched by their male counterparts). I had a horde of clients, but only a few could stimulate my more developed skills. So often, I had to serve as proctor for clients born with little who soon proceeded to less. While I could rarely know whether the Maestro was safeguarding my talents for some future purpose or continuing to sentence me to various backwaters, I did take hope on one occasion when he chose to remark that I might yet be given a post comparable in its challenge to some of the epic encounters of our Company during the first three centuries of the Church in Rome. Yes, that might still be there for me, provided I was ready to pay unremitting attention to my humdrum duties with wretches, thugs, and drunks. I did, and eventually, was selected to oversee the work of a number of minor demons who were keeping watch on a young Austrian family whose developed potentialities might yet prove astounding. Insignificant at present was this embryo and his family, but he had ancestral fault-lines full of the

intoxicating stink of our old friend, blood-scandal. So I was to stay close to him after his birth.

I did not dare to ask, but at this point, the Maestro did choose to speak directly to my curiosity. He said: "Why have I been so interested in this creature not yet born? Can it be that he will yet possess a mighty ambition? I may propose that you take him on full-time. But, remain at ease! At present, it is still no more than a project. It could certainly fail. His future terrors must be allayed by the most reassuring experiences you can arrange for him. And you must guard him from receiving any crushing defeats to his ego in the next few years. In time, if he develops the greater part of his potential promise, he could, as I say, become your only client. Must I say more?"

All this was uttered by the Maestro with characteristic irony. We never know how serious he might be when he speaks to our mind's ear. (His voice is a cornucopia of humours.)

In any case, I dared not ask: What if I fail? Many projects do. On the other hand, I soon learned how he was conceived.

Now, some readers may notice that I first spoke of that exceptional event as if I were the one in the connubial bed. Now, I state that I was not.

Nonetheless, in referring to my participation, I am telling the truth just as completely as if I were purveying a lie. For even as physicists now assume to their scientific confusion that light is both a particle and a wave, so do devils live in both the lie and the truth, side by side.

The explanation—provided one is ready to follow—is considerably less difficult than, let us say, Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity.

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Spirits like myself can exist in events they did not attend. I did not have to be present, therefore, on the night Adolf was conceived. I was able to ingest the exact experience by calling upon the devil (of lower rank) who had been in Alois' bed on the primal occasion. I must say that that is always an option for us—we are able to share a carnal act long after the fact. On the other hand, a minor devil can, on the most crucial occasions, implore the Evil One to be present with him during the actual moments. (The Maestro encourages us to speak of him as the Evil One when he does choose to enter sexual acts, and on this occasion, he was certainly there.)

Afterward, once I began my assignment to Klara, Alois, and young Adolf Hitler, the moment of impregnation was repeated for me by the devil

who had been present. It came into my senses with a completeness of odor and physical impact that can be termed absolute. Thereby, it also happened to me. Among us, to be given an exact recollection is equal to being present. So, I also knew from the incomparable intensity of the occasion that the Maestro had actually joined with the attendant devil for one instant (even as Jehovah offered His immanence to Gabriel during another exceptional event.)

While I would not be attached exclusively to Adolf Hitler for some years, he was always in my Overview and so I am ready to write about his early life with a confidence no conventional biographer could begin to feel. It is obvious that there is no clear classification for this book. It is more than a memoir and most curious as a biography since it is as privileged as a novel in its freedom to enter many a mind. I could even say that it does not really matter since my larger concern is fear of the consequences. I have to be able to do this work without attracting the attention of the Maestro. And that is even possible because in these latter-day American years, he is more attuned to electronics than to print. The Maestro has followed human progress into cyber-technologies far more closely than the Lord.

I have chosen, therefore, to write on paper—which may offer a small protection. My words may not be picked up as quickly. (Even processed paper still contains an ineluctable hint of the tenderness God put into His trees.)

While the Maestro has no desire to use up any part of his resources by monitoring every last one of our acts—there are too many demons and small devils for that—he is also not inclined to let us go on ventures he has not selected. Years ago, I would never have dared to embark on this written record. My fear would have been absolute. But now, with America wallowing in the inundations and engulfments of mass media, one can try to get away with more.

Ergo, I feel ready to continue. The assumption is that I can succeed in concealing my output from the Maestro. Intelligence work can be understood as a contest between code and the obfuscation of code. Since the Maestro is heavily engaged, and his present existence is more arduous than ever—he feels closer to eventual victory—I do feel free to venture out. I have grown more confident that I will be able to conceal the existence of this manuscript until, at least, it is finished. Then I will either feel obliged to print

it or—destroy it. This second option has always offered the safest solution (except for the near-mortal blow to my vanity.)

Of course, if I publish, I will then have to flee from the wrath of the Maestro. There are options open. I could choose to enter the equivalent in our spirit-life of the Federal Witness Protection Program. That is, the Cudgels would hide me. Of course, I would have to cooperate with them.

Ergo, I have a choice—treachery or extinction.

In any case, I do feel less dread. By revealing our procedures, I can enjoy the rarified pleasure (for a devil) of being able to characterize my existence. And should I be able to finish, I will still have the choice of destroying my work, or going over to the other side. I must say, the latter option begins to appeal more to me.

Since I am unfaithful to the Maestro, I must show no sign. My modest duties in America have to be performed impeccably, even as I offer these further details of the work I accomplished in the early upbringing of my most important client.

BOOK V

THE FAMILY

By the time he was a year old, I had called the boy Adolf. It was never
 Adolf or Gott. (Gott was never a word to [myself]). "Look," she would say
 to her children, "look, Alvin, look. Angela isn't real, is she? Little
 angel, isn't it?" Since the baby had a sweet face, big dark eyes as blue as
 his, and a sweet mouth, and they both looked at them. The other two kids, they
 looked with very interest. She was a good stepmother and that was all right
 with Alvin's father, and also with Angela, especially since they had been told
 by Alvin's father that their own mother, Paula, had been crazy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Come now," said two drinkers at once.

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

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

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

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

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

"Which Bishop?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

-3-

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

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

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

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

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

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

that she was even ready to forgive her husband sufficiently to allow him to cross the middle of the bed.

Their second courtship began. She was still breast-feeding Adolf. So, there was no question of a pregnancy. What inspired the return of some carnal interest was her growing appreciation of Alois. He had built strong foundations, after all, for the good future of Adolf. Even as her husband had risen from the mud of Strones and Spital to the honor of an officer's uniform in the service of Franz Josef, she, in turn, was ready to dream of the heights to which little Adolf could ascend should his ability prove equal to the vigor of his father.

For that, however, he would need this same father to love him. Once, in her gentlest voice, she said to Alois, "Sometimes I wonder why you never hold Adi."

"It will just make the other two jealous," he answered. "Jealous kids are not to be trusted with babies."

"Alois and Angela hold him all the time," she said. "They are not jealous. They like him."

"Let us keep it that way. Maybe they are happy I do not hold him."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All this had to change after the episode with Luther.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He smoked all the time. His nickname, unknown to him, was The Cloud of Smoke. (Here, the German is good enough to offer: Der Rauchfung!)

“And today, what is the mood of der Rauchfung?” one young officer might ask another as he came on duty. Alois knew these juniors were resentful because he did not allow them the liberty that he enjoyed—nonetheless, he knew that the very injustice of it would enforce his authority. A good officer must be fair for the most part, yet still exercise certain specific inequalities. Done judiciously, that proved effective. One's inferiors were reduced a notch.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Will he talk to me?"

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

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

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

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

"I think you are the most beautiful."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Actually, there had been little enough punishment on the first day. The fat boy was quick to use his own body to shield Adi from every attack. Besides, it did not take long to grasp the basic principle. Divided into two teams, the boys took turns chasing each other. It was really not a war. More

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

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

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

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

Yet, that night he could hardly sleep. He felt that in time to come, the fat boy, Klaus, would be his lieutenant, while he would be captain.

To accomplish such an aim, he came up with a new set of rules. War, he reasoned, was not two armies charging at each other all the time—war was maneuver! He did not know the word as yet, but he had an instinct for the concept.

To his new mates he now proposed that they move from the flat field to a hill in the next meadow. Each army could now begin at the foot of opposite slopes, and so would not be visible until one or the other crossed the summit.

Once he had convinced the boys of this change, he brought in an amendment. The leader on each side, he insisted, must not be touched. "The highest officer," he argued, "must always be respected."

To gain his point, it did not hurt that stout, sturdy Klaus was always by his side. All the same, Adi was a little amazed at how well he could deal with these matters. So was I.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

also shift their outposts. Of course, this called for larger forces on each side, but Adi was soon able to convince his regulars that more boys should be invited from nearby streets and fields. Of course, they, the originals, having been first on this hill, were entitled to take promotion in rank. Let me offer one of his speeches to his troops.

“Why are we here?” he would ask. “Is it because we need to know more about war? Yes. Because, my friends, when we are big men, we want to be heroes. Is that not true? Klaus, do you want to be a hero?”

“That is what I want.”

“Of course. It is what we all want. All of us. But for that, we must learn more. So, we need more soldiers. How are we to do this?”

“I will tell you. It is by talking to all who are willing to join us. We, who are here now, can then be given high rank. And we who command will be very high in rank. Not just captain, or major, but a general.

“Klaus here, will be my colonel.”

Those are the words he used. While I certainly had helped to endow him with an eloquence no ordinary five-year-old could muster, am happy to admit that some of these good turns of speech came out of him.

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

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

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

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

looking for us. We love them. We do not disabuse them. We enjoy them. Popular writers usually believe they are working both for God and their own prosperous selves. All the while, we are encouraging them to steep their readers in baths of misperception. The profit comes to us. Misperception of reality will, at the least, waste God's Time, and that is a form of compound interest in our economy.

BOOK VI

THE FARM

This year, Abels had a serious reason for moving. He was going to retire. He would buy a farm. In the last year of his Chatham work, he had begun to look about, and by February of 1891, he had purchased the desired estate of the right property in a town where he felt, thirty miles from Leno. In April, Abels and the children moved from Leno to this newly chosen abode. It was, indeed, a most ideal spot. The ground whereon was in the most beautiful position, a high ridge, and there, after the summer, fall would enter the first year. Abels and the children would live on the farm with their four children, while Abels continued his service in Leno.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Five years ago, about the time Adolf was born, he had bought a farm. In many a way that purchase had been more exciting to him than the birth. Unlike the first three of Klara's babies, land was not going to die.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Could these epiphanies be the product of his approaching retirement?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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