

I will barely describe the meal. It would give me no pleasure to carry on about the gold plate, the French dishes, the categories of caviar, the wines (French and Crimean), the vodka, the champagne. All banquets succeed equally in generating the same gastric acids, but here even the guests in St. Vladimir were personally served by three waiters in red coats with gold trim. The menus were illustrated, the Imperial Band played throughout dinner, and the Palace of Facets sparkled.

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

**So ended the greatest day of our lives, the one to
be remembered for years. We all felt that we had seen
the grandest sight that could possibly be imagined and**

we were pretty lucky mortals, everything had gone so beautifully.

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

. . .Nicholas II begins his reign with the good wishes of the entire world. Monarchies, empires, and republics alike united to wish him 'bon voyage' on his momentous journey. From Germany, from France, from a venerable Queen who has reigned longest in the history of England's throne, from our own President, and from many other rulers of nations great and small, he received messages of warmest greeting, and above all, the great heart of the common people with a single impulse felt that it has in the kindly, smiling face of this youthful Tsar the promise of a reign beneficial and just.

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I could understand why Nicky's ministers considered it mandatory that this Coronation surpass every grand European celebration of the past. They were facing gigantic problems. If Russia was immensely rich, it was also extraordinarily poor. For the country to become an economic power comparable to Great Britain or to America, the rapid completion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, begun years earlier, was now paramount. Ever in need of a large inflow of foreign funds to continue work on this railroad, Russia had been obliged five years before the Coronation to export most of its grain to the West. The Minister of Finance under Alexander III had declared that there

was no other choice. Grain was the only commodity Russia could offer in bulk. So the largest portion of the harvest had been exported, therefore. That brought on the famine of 1891. Millions of peasants died of starvation.

Now, hundreds of thousands of the relatives of these peasants had come to Moscow where they congregated at various railroad stations in the city. Many slept on the floor. This occasioned a comment from the Maestro: "Of course these peasants are looking to stay in railroad stations. Five years ago they watched their grain being taken away on freight cars. Now, they wait at the depot to see what will come back."

The peasants were certainly of interest to us. Without their loyalty, how could Nicholas II exercise his rule? He could not count on the cities. The proletariat, most recently peasants themselves, now lived with their diseases—cholera, typhus, syphilis, and tuberculosis. Alcoholism was one social problem, prostitution another. Both were immense. Housing was overcrowded, most desperately.

The sale of the grain in 1891 had, however, served its economic purpose. Investment in heavy industry did triple over the next ten years. To

balance such growth, the sewers of Moscow flooded slum streets in summer even as workers froze to death in winter.

Those who remained in their villages still lived in one-room log cabins with interiors blackened by smoke. Cheap reproductions of icons were on the wall, but any visitor who came into a peasant's cabin felt obliged to bow at once before these faded representations. Only then would he greet the master of the house who, as master, had the best place to sleep. That was on top of the oven, still warm from the remains of the fire which had heated the evening meal. The rest of the family slept on the floor. To undress was unheard of, but if the room was not too cold, the men would take off their boots before lying down. They had a saying: "The reek of your feet will scatter the flies."

Nonetheless, I respected the peasants I saw at the railroad stations. If the men and women were old before their time, and had few teeth, they were as strong, nonetheless, as draft animals. For that matter, they rarely moved—they had the patience of cattle. Yet, my study gave me some intimation of why the Dummkopf might be devoting so much attention to Russia. These poor, ugly, big, strong, dumb men with their plain, sturdy, and often misshapen wives mates might be mean, small-minded, ignorant,

bewildered, even stupefied, but all that could amount to no more than protective wax over a fine jelly in a jar. Beneath their torpor, I could sense a capacity to be strong, wise, generous, fair, loyal, yes, even understanding, or so had Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky harangued their readers. If future genius was to be found in the peasantry of Russia this was of grave concern to us. Our aim, after all, was to reduce human possibilities to the point where we could take the reins away from the Dummkopf.

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My day was arriving. An immense gathering, scheduled to take place in Khodynskoe Field on May 18 would honor all the peasants now in the city, a convening for those who had traveled hundreds of miles by railroad, by wagon, even some few on foot in order to be in Moscow when the Tsarevitch became the Tsar.

The event on the field had been planned to demonstrate Nicky's love for his people. It would celebrate their value. It would entertain them. Circus performers, singers and dancers would appear, and at numerous stands and kiosks on the field, gifts offered by the Tsar and Tsarina were to be distributed. The great open stretches of Khodynskoe were ready to receive half a million

souls. Four hundred thousand iron mugs, painted in red and gold, bearing Nicky's initials, would be given out free. There would also be silk scarves for the women, ten thousand gallons of beer, and countless packages of food containing Russian bread, walnuts, sausage, cookies, and jam accompanied by a small book about the Coronation bearing the Tsar and Tsarina's initials.

To face the horde, Nicky, Alexandra, and members of the court would arrive after midday and sit in state on a Royal Pavilion recently erected at one end of the parade ground. It would offer places to a thousand notables. Nearby would be another pavilion with seats for an additional thousand men and women who were ready to pay handsomely for the privilege.

Among a few officials, there was considerable concern the night before that there might not be enough police. Only three officers had been assigned to oversee a company of one hundred and fifty Cossacks ready to serve as enforcers. One hundred and fifty Cossacks to control half a million Russian souls? Their commander applied for more guards, but was told there was a shortage of police. After all, many areas of the city had to be guarded against demonstrations by rowdies or revolutionaries. Moreover, the government had already spent large sums maintaining security for the Tsar during the

ceremonial week. Now, there was not enough money available for new security. It was obvious to me that the relative absence of police at the Field had to reflect the hand of the Maestro.

We were ready, then, to take advantage. Thirteen years ago, following the Coronation of Alexander III, Khodynskoe Field had also served as the site for a peasants' festival. While several unhappy episodes had taken place, and thirty peasants had lost their lives, it had been considered an acceptable loss. One could not be held accountable for every mishap in so large a gathering.

Indeed, it was Nicky who decided to hold the Peasants' Festival in the same place again. That might initiate a new tradition. "From what you tell me," he told his ministers, "we need more traditions."

One problem that was not examined, however, was the field. In 1891, a large exhibition had been held on its ground, and temporary construction had been thrown up. Afterward, no funds were available for filling the excavations. So this immense parade field was now scarred with sand pits, small gulches, and un-capped wells. Broad paths had been laid out to skirt these hindrances and it was assumed people would move prudently. There was, after all, enough level space for half a million visitors.

In truth, there had been more immediate concerns than Khodynskoe Field. The multitudes who would arrive had to be sheltered. Some peasants might have family members who worked in factories, and so had lodgings. The grease of sheep-skin jackets and sweat-ridden capes, caftans, and black woolen coats, would hardly be unfamiliar odors. And, of course, there were the railroad stations. They could and did serve as housing. What proved unexpected for the authorities was the great number of peasants who decided to come to the field on the night before. By evening, multitudes were already encamped. There was drinking, there was singing, there were bonfires. Balalaikas were played. The word had gone out through the city. The gifts would be distributed early. We had disseminated that rumor. Yes, the best stuff would go first. Thousands of peasants moved up, therefore, and started pressing on the wooden barriers that shielded the huts and kiosks and counters which housed the gifts. Others kept pushing forward from behind. Then, hours before first morning light, some good part of the working populace of Moscow began to arrive. The slums were marching in. They, too, had heard the rumor.

On this night of the 17th, a gala also took place at the Bolshoi Theatre. Many ladies were wearing their diamonds, so many that the glow of the gems—as a good number remarked—could compete with the footlights. Yet, most of the gentry were talking about the Field. It was said that by late morning one million souls would throng to Khodynskoe. One million souls! "Yes," was the word at the Bolshoi, "Never before have so many of the common people been ready to offer their reverence to the Tsar."

That was at the gala. At the Field, there was a dreadful restlessness. Some peasants began rocking the posts that supported the barriers. "The good stuff is gone," our agents were there to say. "The mugs are gone. The beer is gone." "No," went a counter-rumor, "the beer is not gone, but there is little left." The first barriers began to tilt. Then, they fell. The nearest kiosks were overrun. Even as some were reaching for the gifts on display, they were knocked down from behind as the throngs kept pushing up from the rear, jamming into the thousands who were already up front. A man had no more than to stumble and another would crash over him. A third would go down, a fourth was left prostrate. More bodies pushed forward. Women screamed. Children wailed. It grew worse. Masses of men, women, and children were

now being driven pell-mell into the largest of the sand pits where they thrashed about at the bottom in a hurly-burly, searching for a grip on another body by which to climb out of the pit even as new crushes were falling over them. Suffocations began. I had never heard such woe. Thousands of throats were roaring with rage, legions were shrieking in terror. Smaller men and women were thrown upward like spray. Children cried out under the weight of boots clambering over them. The sounds were unearthly. Who was to count how many hundreds of heels were now grinding down upon hundreds of torsos? Some were even saved. Some! A few children were lifted and passed backward from arm to arm overhead. Adults who were able to reach the edge of the crowd collapsed like minnows in the shallows, not able to breathe nor stir, then able to breathe, or just about. Others were braying out the names of family members. Some showed faces petrified by grief.

Yet, in much the manner that a storm dies down, it came to an end. Those who had broken through to the booths and trampled over the kiosks were forced to keep moving forward by the ongoing pressure of those behind—until finally they reached one end of the field. Others squeezed their way off to the side. Some in the rear, hearing screams ahead, drew back and

pushed no longer. As the frenzy abated, flocks moved off in four directions. The dead lay in the pits and on the flats.

In these early hours of daylight, some of the fallen still quivering, disorder spread to the streets of Moscow. Tens of thousands of Muscovites who had been planning to be present at the official opening later that morning had chosen to leave their homes early. Now, as they approached on foot, wagons were coming toward them carrying the dead, and these bloody wagons were surrounded by men and women wailing in grief. Some were hysterical. They would laugh for one moment, groan at the next. Not knowing whether to consider themselves blessed by having escaped, they also had to fear they were in peril of losing their souls, since they also felt an unholy readiness to laugh. How could they not when the smallest part of them had secretly despised the dead relative for years?

Those who were still coming toward Khodynskoe grew bewildered. All these screaming faces, coming off the field. Every wagon carried bodies in various stages of ruined peasant finery. Many of the dead still lay on the field with shattered noses, bloody faces, broken limbs, cock-eyed jaws, twisted bodies near to nude. On the wagons, more than a few had been covered in the

remnants of other people's clothes, scraps torn from one corpse to cover the nakedness of another.

Later came estimates of the number of lives lost. At first, Nicky was told that the number was three hundred, but this minister was well known for reducing bad news by ninety per cent. Later, Nicky was told that it was 1300 people. The final toll was three thousand.

Earlier, the first wagon-loads of unidentified dead had been taken to Vagankovsky Cemetery. Until this hour, that ground had been kept exclusively for followers of Orthodoxy. On this morning, however, that could hardly be determined, especially since the first impulse on the arrival of higher police officials was to get the bodies off the field before the Tsar arrived. Time later to count the dead.

Meanwhile, the morning was reaching into its full glory. It was the tenth fine day in a row. The onion domes of the forty times forty churches of Moscow were resplendent in the sun. The domes, covered with gold leaf, glowed as if they belonged to the sun, and their bells, celebrating this event, offered a variety of clangor, loud or delicately toned. But to the ears of those walking away from the field, the sounds of wailing and keening chased them

in a cacophony of whimpering, howling, sorrowing, blubbing, bawling and lamentation that brought an unholy disharmony to the bells.

I, however, aroused by the extent of our triumph, felt as if I could see into the failings of half the people I passed. So many were sick in heart, sick in soul, sick in stomach, slime clinging to their spirit, lost in the vortex of a dream. Meanwhile, the sun reflected the gold of the onion domes above each church. For the past half year, laborers in high peril of slipping off the steep pitches of church roofs rimed in winter ice had labored nonetheless at fastening new leaf to these gilded domes.

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At noon, before the Tsar and Tsarina arrived, most of the litter on Khodynskoe Field had been cleared. There was still torn clothing on the sand and in the pits, but the bodies were gone. Several companies of soldiers quickly brought in had moved the last of the dead to areas beyond the outlying kiosks. There, laid in orderly rows, they would remain until the wagons could transport them to a cemetery, or relatives came upon their remains with shouts and screams of recognition. Of course, Nicky and Alix were on their arrival seated far enough away not to hear such sounds. Instead, a chorus of a thousand young men and women had been installed in front of the Royal

Pavilion, and their voices prevailed. The viewing stands were filled with distinguished foreigners and Muscovites in their best uniforms, the ladies in afternoon finery. The social principle that one must never recognize unpleasantness during a formal occasion was in force. I have been present at galas when a guest, usually one of ours, breaks wind. The repugnance of those nearby sits in the air for a few moments. Sometimes, longer. No one remarks on it. For the social record, it has not happened. This ability to ignore the repellent has always been the ingrained strength of the upper classes.

Now, hearing this gifted chorus of one thousand heavenly voices offering a vocal collation, who would be in a rush to recognize that a few hours ago, horror had taken place? No, the well-dressed Russians in the pavilions, given their desire to ape the best manners of the British upper classes, now carried themselves like privileged onlookers during a notable day at the races. The ladies and gentlemen in the stands looked near to perfect, and would have been, but for one contretemps. An unbelievably strong wind blew up without warning, and scattered clouds of dust across the parade ground. This noxious whirlwind soon reached the pavilions at the edge of Khodynskoe. There should have been no such wind on so glorious a day. All

had been still. Yet, the gust had come. I hardly knew if I was witnessing the fury of the Dummkopf or the rage of the dead.

On the tail of this wind, the Tsar and Tsarina arrived. Everything changed. It was as if the gale was ready to be dispelled by one more uproar of cheers so loud one could barely hear the band, that immense orchestra of national brass as it played the anthem with stentorian exaltation. Khodynskoe Field was now only half visible because of the fresh dust roused by the carriages of all the latecomers coming in now after the tumult of the morning. Soon enough, Nicky and Alexandra waved to people flocking in, and shortly after, left the pavilion to step into their carriage and be driven a few hundred yards over to Petrovsky Palace where the Tsar would now receive selected groups of chosen citizens. In the glimpse I caught of him, he looked exceptionally pale and I wondered if he knew what had happened. I suspect his information was still highly imperfect, but in any event, the prearranged ceremonies were maintained. Not a quarter mile from Khodynskoe, Nicky and Alix now stood at the Petrovsky gates to receive these new delegations. There were fourteen groups in all bearing gifts. A special offering from the Cathedral of Christ the Savior was presented to Nicky and Alix first—a large

platter for ceremonial bread and salt. Nine months had been spent by eight men carving this platter out of crystal. Nicky screwed up his buttocks to force a little gratitude into his expression, and then proceeded to thank the eight workers for the splendid niceties of their work. Next came a Cavalry regiment, the Georgiyevskys. A delegation of peasant women was followed by distinguished artists of the Moscow Imperial Theater. After which, a delegation from the Moscow coachmen paid their respects. There was even a gift from the Moscow All-Believers who offered a silver platter on which Nicky's initials had been laid out in diamonds. They were soon replaced by an army of contractors who had decorated Moscow with lights and false fronts for the Processional on May 9th. Representatives of the caterers, plus the Society of the Hunt, the Moscow Racing Club, and even (for their centuries of service since the time of Peter the Great) a few of the leaders of the long-established German colony in Moscow came filing by. After this, Nicky and Alix were able to enter the palace and preside over a feast for the honored representatives of the common people. Inserting his remarks between choruses of cheers, Nicholas II spoke to these plebian elders: "The Empress and I heartily thank you for your expression of love and dedication. We do not doubt these

feelings are shared by your fellow villagers. Care for your welfare is close to my heart."

I happened to look at the time. To me, this is no more than a phrase. I do not need a watch. No devil is ever without a clear sense of the hour, the minute, even the second. So I can state that as the Tsar was making his speech, a simultaneous event occurred at a morgue—a devil reported the exact time of this other occasion. Two of the corpses who had been carried from the transport wagons and laid out on morgue tables, happened to rise up out of their comatose state. They even cried out in unison. From opposite ends of the room! They had appeared to be dead, but now they were obviously alive.

If I mention these upstarts, it is to emphasize the conjunction of the two occasions. I would even learn that Alix was suffering her own climax of foreboding at what had to be close to the same moment. To each of the guests who came forward, she had smiled and bobbed her head, still a pouter pigeon. She was, however, living in terror. She was filled with a thought that her own death was near and so was Nicky's. In what danger was her husband! She even allowed herself to feel some open wrath against the Russian people. Why, she asked herself, had they felt so obliged to riot? She even said to her

husband, "There is little courtesy among our Moujiks." Nicky did not know whether to be offended or pleased that she spoke of our Moujiks. (These thoughts I received at second hand from a special Russian devil who maintained his entree to one of Alix's ladies-in-waiting.)

A half mile away from Petrovsky Palace, some soldiers were laying out the last of the victims, and on those far fringes of Khodynskoe Field, other hundreds of peasants and Muscovites were searching for lost family. Meanwhile, Nicky proceeded from table to table offering greetings to the villagers as they ate their Poltava Borscht, their veal with fresh greens, cold whitefish, roast spring chicken, duckling, fresh and pickled cucumbers, dessert, fruit, wines.

Back in the stands, jugglers and gypsy dancers were performing for the gentry. Ice cream was being sold. And behind the hutches, corpses were still being laid out in rows while distraught relatives kept staring into the battered faces of cadavers who had perished hours ago but might, despite all disfigurement, still retain a recognizable feature. A few of the disappointed even laid a copper coin on the cold chest of a stranger. In some places, piles of bodies remained in a heap, fifty here, twenty there, arms and legs at outraged

angles, filthy clothing. Doctors knelt in the dust to see if anyone stirred. All of a sudden, one of the dead was no longer to be counted as dead. He rose up. His wife, who had been weeping beside him, began to beat herself on the breast. "God is here!" she screamed, "God is here! God has saved you!" But another family, just fifty feet away, engaged in false mourning for the demise of a long-lived family patriarch, were now shrieking. For that old tyrant also opened his eyes. "The devil sent you back, you monster!" his aged wife cried out.

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I was not a leading actor during the riots just described. The Maestro had stated it directly: I was not sufficiently familiar with Moscow to command the local devils. Instead, I was to continue my watch on Nicky since family discords were bound to break out. I had to recognize that I had not been seen as pitiless enough to lead on the Field. That pinched my vanity. I saw myself as capable of any task, high or low, but I should have known that my assignment to study the letters and diaries of the Romanovs would remain my basic role. Nonetheless, the knowledge proved of use for years to come. The Romanovs did not perish in a bloody muck of broken bones on that day, but they would suffer depredations in the aftermath.

An immediate result was the lowered efficiency of the Cudgels. There were now gaps in the circle of protection they formed around Nicky. I was able, for example, to approach within viewing distance of the Tsar when he and Alix showed up at mid-day to sit in the viewing stands. By grace of the passage which the Maestro had succeeded in keeping open to his thoughts, I could detect that Nicky was not only unseemly pale as he approached the pavilion, but that this pallor came from an unruly passion. I could feel its intensity. Some turn red with rage. He was pale with unspoken fury. Like Alix, his primal displeasure was directed toward the peasants. How could they have been so ungrateful, so self-destructive? Yet—heavy as chains lying upon his heart—it was his duty to forgive them. Could he call upon such a noble sentiment when he was marooned in anger? There were so many aspects to his fury. For he was equally enraged at the ineptitude of the police. And soon enough, was furious at himself. He had not paid attention to the arrangements for security. Much of this could have been prevented. Or was that true? Had the events been inevitable? Were his fortunes cursed? He did not know. He could hardly know. That night, he wrote in his diary:

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

I kept studying the phrase, "a great sin has taken place." Was it the rioters or himself to whom he referred? For on the afternoon of May 18th, Count Witte, who was the particular statesman Nicky listened to most, had sent word: "In respect for the dead, all festivities should be cancelled immediately." Then, Witte added, "Most particularly, the French Ambassador's Ball." That was scheduled to take place on this very night, and it had been planned as the largest social event of the Coronation.

Disagreement with Count Witte came quickly. Nicky's uncle, the Governor General of Moscow, the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, married to Alix's older sister, Ella, had taken over, among his other duties, the position of Director of the Peasants' Festival. By messenger, Sergei Alexandrovich sent a reply to Witte: "The Tsar considers Khodynka a great disaster, but

would inform you that in effect it was not so great a disaster that it should darken the Coronation holiday."

The older Grand Dukes, brothers to this Governor-General, were in accord. But their sentiments, I soon learned, were revolting to Nicky's cousins, the younger generation of Grand Dukes. Indeed, Nicky's dearest friend—his first cousin, Sandro, who was married to Nicky's sister Xenia—declared that the attitude of his uncles, these older Romanovs, this senior level of Grand Dukes, could only be described as "monstrous." And Sandro's brothers, the sons of grand Duke Mikhail, were in passionate agreement. Under no circumstances should Nicky attend the French ball tonight. What an outrageous insult to the dead! Where was Russia's honor? The Tsar, four days into his Coronation, was ready to agree with Sandro, but just then came Uncle Alexey into the room, and this Grand Duke was the oldest remaining brother of his dead father.

"Nicky," said Uncle Alexey, "surely you are aware that your cousins, these Mikhailovichi, and Sandro most particularly, are not people you can afford to listen to. They are young and inexperienced. They are radical. They are silly. They are worse than silly. I tell you, they will never admit it

to themselves, but they are siding with unholy forces. They wish to depose Sergei Alexandrovitch so they can put in one of their own as Governor-General of Moscow. Think what that will do to Sergei Alexandrovitch and to Ella. Your wife will be distraught that her beautiful sister Ella has to suffer this disgrace."

I was near enough to hear these opinions. Again, the Cudgels were not about. A host of just-perished souls must be in need of succor—perhaps the Dummkopf had dispatched the Cudgels to the morgue. This once, at any event, it was not at all difficult to stay close to Nicky.

So, I heard Sandro's brother, Nicolai Alexandrovich. So soon as Uncle Alexey marched off, he was ready to speak. "Nicky, I beg of you, do not go tonight to the French Ball. Recognize what I am saying. Whether we like it or not, we are still living in the shadow of Versailles. Louis the XVI and Marie Antoinette could dance all night because they were naïve. They had no sense of the approaching storm. But we do. We know!

"Nicky, search into your heart. What happened, has happened. The blood of these men, these women, and these children will remain forever upon your reign. That is unfair, because you are good, you are kind. I know, if you

could, you would revive the dead. But you cannot. So, Nicky, you must show your sympathy to their families. Your allegiance to them. Your respect. How can you allow the enemies of this regime—and they are everywhere—to be able to say that our young emperor was engaged in dancing through the night while his slaughtered subjects were taken to Potter's Field?"

His eloquence succeeded in reaching the heart of Nicky's feelings. Nicky did not want to go to the Ball. But his cousin could not maintain the high level of his argument. Nicolai Alexandrovitch soon surrendered eloquence to rage. "Why, I would ask," he went on, "didn't Sergei Alexandrovitch anticipate how great was the need for police? Any fool could have told him." Soon enough, he was hinting that nasty tricks had been played with the funds set aside for Coronation events. Could this cousin have been listening to the same rumors I had come upon? In Moscow, the word was out that the Governor-General was siphoning off Coronation funds to pay for his gambling debts. It was not true. Sergei Alexandrovitch was not guilty of that. It happened to be his assistant. (That fellow was not only in debt to certain gamblers, but to us—one more of our Russian agents. Indeed, it was this assistant who had initiated the rumor that the Governor-General was corrupt.)

Poor Nicky. If he had one weakness, it was that he could not hold two opposed ideas in his mind long enough to decide which argument might have more to offer. Just as he was in the midst of giving real attention to cousin Nikolai's fine speech, so two of his uncles came back to the room. They proceeded to explain, and in the sharpest terms, that it would be an international insult should Nicky not be present at the Ball. The French Embassy had made expensive preparations. The absence of the Tsar and Tsarina would affect relations between the two countries. "Nicky, we depend upon the French alliance. For that alone, you must attend. The French take pride in measuring themselves by the sanity they can muster in crises. They detest sentimentality. They are proud of their froideur. If you are absent, they will see you as a womanly creature, swayed by compassion, exactly when we are in need of sound diplomacy. Foreign policy must not be determined by accidents."

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

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

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

Sandro and his brothers had long been aware of Sergei's credo. On this night, they found his presence doubly intolerable. So, the brothers made a point of leaving at the moment that dancing began. Uncle Alexey spoke out loudly: "There go the four imperial followers of Robespierre."

I was content. The Maestro would be pleased. He would also be amused, I was certain, when he learned that I had been able that night to insinuate myself into the Royal Chamber. That would hardly be believed. I had reached the Bedroom. The Cudgels were in more disarray than I could ever recall.

So, for a few minutes, (before the Cudgels returned and I had to decamp) I was able not only to insinuate myself a little further into Nicky's mind but could even report that he felt doomed. Doomed and damned. He knew this with certainty. It would take more than two decades to confirm what he knew on this night. But this night he knew. He was truly appalled. He told Alix that it might be his duty to retire to a monastery where he could pray for the victims. It was no way to speak to a wife on a night so full of a sense of doom. It may even account for the letter Alix would yet write to her friend, the German Countess Rantzau.

**I feel that all who surround my husband are
insincere. And no one is doing his duty for Russia.
They are all serving him for their career and personal
advantage and I worry myself and cry for days on end
as I feel my husband is very young and inexperienced—
of which they are taking advantage.**

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

Before the Coronation, she had made a critical mistake. She had confided to her closest lady-in-waiting that she adored Nicky. "I love him so much. I call him secret names."

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

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

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

In the event, the dear friend did not feel free to give the secret away at once. It took a few nights before she told one friend and then another. They, too, took a vow of silence, but did not wait as long before breaking their oath. Moscow's society was soon snickering over the Tsarina's much avowed love of English. Anyone who had a reputation for knowing what others did not know was now familiar with Alix and Nicky's secret words to each other.

"Lovy, Boysy, Sweet one, my soul, mannikins mine, sweety, pussy-mine."

After they finished laughing at Alix, one of the ladies felt bound to remind the others, "She comes to us from behind a coffin. She carries misfortune."

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

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

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

By now, I was awaiting orders to leave. I did not know if I could acclimate myself to Hafeld after these exceptional days in Moscow, but the Maestro was quick to tell me: "Respect Hafeld. It is important." There was no reason to believe or disbelieve him—his real opinion was, after all, concealed behind the mirrors of his impenetrable bearing, but I can say that on my arrival back to Austria, I did feel better than I had in years. Khodynka was the largest operation in which I had participated over many years. Or, so it seemed to me.

It is sad that few devils are permitted to retain much memory, but the Maestro employs the same principle as intelligence agencies. No one in intelligence is supposed to know anything about a project until there is a need

to know. We, in turn, are not encouraged to remember whatever we will not use for a new project.

Since I believe that I have been a devil for many centuries and have risen in rank and been demoted, it could be asked why, with such a history, I still had to learn a good deal while in Russia. It is because a newly-gained sophistication fades once a venture comes to an end. So, we gain many interesting qualities of mind, but soon lose them. What is of interest here is that the Maestro allowed me to keep these recent experiences intact. Khodynka remained in my memory and my morale stayed close to excellent. Returning to the Hitler family, I could, given our success in Russia, believe again that the Maestro's aims were not small for this client, this young Adolf Hitler.

Filled now with a lightness of spirit altogether apart from the heaviness that is requisite to being loyal when there is no choice, I felt elevated upon my return to Hafeld. Soon enough I no longer thought about Nicky or Alix. Where was the need? If I was in future to be called back to Russia, the necessary recollections would be reconstituted.

In fact, it is interesting that I had such thoughts for, indeed, I was sent back to Russia in 1908, and would remain there intermittently until the murder of Rasputin eight years later—that incomparable Rasputin, a most exceptional client. He was able to work in the closest union with me, but did insist upon continuing as well in the service of an astute and elevated Cudgel. What wars we had over Rasputin's soul.

I may yet look to portray these exceptional events, but that is not for this book. All large interruptions concluded, I now wish to record what happened to Alois, Klara, and Adolf over the next nine years. That will bring a close to this literary venture. For the present, then, we are back at the farm. From here, I can see the path that leads to Der Alte's house.

BOOK IX

ALOIS-JUNIOR

-1-

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

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

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

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

"Burn it."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yes, that was like Alois-Junior.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Esteemed daughter,

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

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

Your father,

Johann Poelzl

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To be courteous, Alois smiled. So did Junior.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You must listen to your father."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I don't care."

"You must. Bubbles make honey uncomfortable."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Try and make me," said Adi.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A silence. It was followed by a deeper silence.

"I will try," she said at last.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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