

moment. "You allowed your wife to be so much worse to Angela? This is surely not right."

"Angela was crying Ulan down," said Alois Junior. "I don't."

"I may not handle horses as much," said Klara, "but I am still older to you and he who rides the animal has the duty afterward. The horse has a difference, even if you don't."

"You know nothing about the subject," said his nephew. "When it comes to horses, you are ten degrees less than zero."

"Silence!" shouted Alois. "You are much older than the rest of the world. Not one word!"

-6-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Jawohl!" shouted Alois-Junior.

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

Alois-Junior stood up and left the table.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The three neighbors suggested, in turn, an emetic, a binder, and a diarrhetic. All were wrong. The sow stopped breathing, began to hemorrhage, and was gone. All three had assumed the trouble could only be in the stomach or the bowels. Where else in a pig? Who had ever heard of consumption in so big a pig? Perhaps it was something else. Even the veterinarian he called in after the demise was unsure. Probably the lungs, but he would not say.

Nothing could have aggravated Alois more. To pay good money after the animal had died! Why? Because he had to know the cause. What an idiocy! He wasn't going to raise any more pigs, not now, but still he had to

know. And then he found out that the veterinarian—if you could call him that—remained no more sure of the cause than his neighbors. It would take, he told Alois, the expense of laboratory tests they could do in Linz. To hell with that! Such an expenditure would be obscene. On top of it, he had to bury the animal whole. He was tempted, but he did not dare to carve away at the beast looking for good meat. Left to himself, Alois would have searched for some choice cuts—how much did the hams have to do, after all, with the lungs? But, no, the vet was definite. "Do not take a chance, Herr Hitler, on any part of this animal."

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

Yes, these were losses to calculate. What kind of profits could he point to from his mediocre potato crop? When he added the cost of the seed potatoes, the compost he had bought for the three acres, and then subtracted the wages of the hired hand, the loss of the sow, and the fee of the vet as well, how could he claim to have made any respectable sum? If not for the

walnuts, which had, as promised, been easy money right off the ground, he would have had no profit at all.

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

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

Klara, seven and a half months pregnant, tried to explain it to him. Now that the potato crop was in, and so much hard work was finished, it

was not unnatural to feel a little unhappy. Women, she could tell him, were that way after a child was born. So much had gone into the womb, so much hope and effort, but now one was empty again. The baby might be there and beautiful, but for a time the woman had to feel empty. For a little while. It was natural.

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

So, it was settled. Alois' son, driven by the excitement, would take the fourteen-year-old to Linz. There he would travel by train to Vienna, where he could get on a steamer that passed through Trieste. The boy still gazed, and a cloud of dark premonition could lift.

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

His first school days proceeded through a bright and cheerful September, a fine walk with his class. Life still numbered. There was only one peril—a full-grown bull grazing in a fenced-in pasture.

-7-

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

As to what depth down into his quick-
beating chest these accusations entered, but deep they went, and for good

So, it was settled. Alois' cart, driven by the hired man, would take the fourteen-year-old to Linz. Then he would travel by train to Weitra, where he could get on a jitney that passed through Spital. The boy was gone, and a cloud of dark presentiment could lift.

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

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

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

Probably, she did not know to what depth down into his quick-beating chest these accusations entered, but deep they went, and for good

cause. They were true. He did have an odor—a touch of sulphur and an unmistakable hint of something rotten—of that I may soon choose to speak. Such off-odor is one of the constant problems of our clients. It besets us. The Cudgels are quick to pick up such a clue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Angela was concerned these days by having ordered her first period. Now, Klaus had done his best to allay the girl's distress. She could see that it was all connected in Angela's mind with Rose who hemorrhaged blood all over her limbs before she died.

To bring some calm to such outraged feelings, Klaus spoke for the first time of innocent matters. She adored her step-daughter. The twelve-year-old was by now her substitute for a close friend, and so she spoke not only of this new condition, but went on at good length about odor in general, and its peculiar subtleties in nature. Odor was part of nature. Casting about for happy examples, she presented a piece of information

-8-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes."

"How do these bees not get mixed up?"

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

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

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

"You have never smelled it yourself?"

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

She began to laugh. In certain ways, she knew him well. He might read his books on the subject, but, at bottom, he did not like to admit that he

had not learned the subject by way of his hands, his feet, his strength, his five good peasant senses.

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

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

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

He explained then that the young queen, very much a virgin, not twenty days out of her own wax cell, (which was no larger in width and depth than the eraser tip on the end of a new pencil) would, so soon as she emerged from that cell, be fed by Queen bee nurses and Queen bee

attendants. Yet, just three weeks from that first day, she would be ready to take her virgin flight out of the hive. Usually this would happen on the first warm day in May. Up she would lift into the heavens, flying higher than all but a few male bees who would attempt to follow.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What?"

"No! Donnerwetter, he can't pull out! The queen has hooks, or something of the kind, very sharp hooks, and that keeps him there. She

likes him there. He is stuck. When he does insist, when he has to pull away, you won't believe it, his good organ is ripped right out of him. He is obliged to leave it behind. His manhood! Gone. All gone."

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

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

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

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

Of course, he certainly did not go on to tell her of two other things. The first was that the queen was perfectly capable of having other lovers after that first fabulous flight. Over the next few weeks and into June, she

could have five or six more lovers. That would store more semen in her ovaries, enough to lay thousands, then tens of thousands of eggs, one each to every cell among those thousands of cells, and continue to do so until cold weather came. Then this cycle could be repeated each Spring for the next three years to come. All that wealth of impregnation derived from no more than five or six copulations! This meant that for the rest of her life, the Queen would have no more to do with drones, but would be feeding honey and pollen to the pupae she had created while her court, her worker females, followed her with devotion, capping the cells of larvae yet to emerge with a mysterious wax substance they were able to make from the pollen of the May flowers, a wax that no chemist could duplicate in the laboratory. No, he did not describe how devotedly the Queen would have to work for the rest of her life, and he certainly did not tell Klara that when mating season was done, these female worker-bees would evict the drones from the hive. When it came to dealing with the laziest bums who would not stir, the worker-bees would sting the drones to death. (Nor did the worker bees lose their stinger on such occasions. The belly of a drone was softer than human skin.) After the slaughter, these same worker bees would

sweep the carcasses out of the hive. Nor did he speak of other complications. There was always a tendency, once real warm weather began, for as much as half of the colony to be ready to swarm, that is, to fly away, desert the hive, go back to the way they used to live in the hole of a tree. You could lose your profit in a hurry. Nor did he tell her of new queens who were often extinguished by the court of bees who surrounded the Queen Bee. He left such details alone. It was better that Klara should remain sympathetic to what would be his oncoming enterprise.

Klara had not only been engrossed by what he told her that night, but now decided it might divert Angela from her woes, and so decided to tell her about the poor wrenching end of the brave drone who did succeed in reaching the Queen. This time, Klara had company in her laughter. They carried on as if they were both of the same age, and as Klara divulged more and more of what she had learned from Alois, the topic turned not only to odor, but to the exceptional power of the Queen Bee. There she was, this creature, hardly larger than her own nursing bees and certainly smaller than any drone. Nonetheless, she had the power to impregnate the air of the hive and the thousands who dwelt within it. All of them would know their own

hive since they all smelled the same. "It is," said Klara, full of a new set of giggles, "as if all Russian men and women have one kind of awful aroma, and those Polish oafs another. Maybe there is a good decent smell of tea for the English, and we Austrians, we have to be something special, we are warm like strudel." Again, she had Angela full of giggles. "And the French, yes, a shameless ugly scent. So harsh! Worse than rotten onions and old gravy. Italians—nothing but garlic." They were hugging each other by now. "Maybe the very worst, the Bohemians. I shouldn't describe them. Stinking old cabbage."

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

All this talk of good and bad smells gave a special tingle to Angela's nose. In school, she was now most aware of Fraulein Werner with all her talcum powder, and then there was her own little Adi. He was absolutely smelly at times, especially when he ran up and down too many hills. She was always coaxing him to use more soap, or on those nights once a week when Klara boiled enough water for each of them to bathe in the big wash-

tub, Angela would insist on lathering his back and his armpits before returning the bar of soap to him. Then, with a wholly mischievous grin—"You have the soap now, so put it where it can do some work, you careless boy."

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

Angela, however, would begin to brood once again on the death of Rosig. The prize sow had indeed been full of a strong odor, not unlike Adi at his worst, or was it Rosig at her worst?—enough! Angela began to cry for both, the boy and the pig together. Full of remorse for teasing him, she tried to make amends by telling him a few of the wonderful secrets Klara had told her, all of this new knowledge about bees, and on many a morning as the two walked to school, she would take up the topic again—her head was so full of what she had been told that Adi's imagination was soon inflamed by the mysteries of the Queen Bee.

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

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

So when he heard that his father might be going to talk to a neighbor about purchasing what Alois called "the first materials"—an announcement he made on a Saturday evening at dinner, Adi had a vivid dream that night. He saw an army of bees flying in circles above the farm. Standing near their house was an old man who was dressed differently from anyone Adi had ever seen. His shirt remained outside his pants and came to his knees, and

he wore an old knit wool hat over his white hair, a hat as long as a stocking. It hung half down his back. He was not short, but he still looked like a dwarf because he was bent over. In this dream, Adi knew his name. The man was called Der Alte, and the boy woke up on Sunday morning to learn that his father was actually going to visit a beekeeper named Der Alte.

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

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

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

-9-

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

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

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

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

...why the Creator...which men, women, and children had gone over to the laboratory. Indeed, I would propose that the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BOOK VII

DER ALTE AND THE BEES

I will speak first, however, of the dream I installed in Ad's sleep. That was on the Friday night which preceded Alois' meeting with the bookkeeper on Sunday and the dream was delivered in response to a direct order from the Maestro. I will add this: creating a dream, especially one that has no connection to the dreamer's personal experience is not routine. While we can, on special occasions, insert our own content into our client's sleep, it is also true that dream-works produced gradually make serious inroads on our budget.

-1-

I will speak first, however, of the dream I installed in Adi's sleep. That was on the Saturday night which preceded Alois' meeting with the beekeeper on Sunday and the dream was delivered in response to a direct order from the Maestro. I will add that creating a dream, especially one that has no connection to the dreamer's previous experience is not routine. While we can, on special occasions, insert whole scenarios into our client's sleep, it is also true that dream-works produced ex nihilo make serious inroads on our budget.

Moreover, when the client is young, there is risk involved. Cudgels who might be involved with the client can be more than troublesome if they become aware of what we are attempting. Delicate manipulations calculated to alter future reactions in a subject's psyche should not be undertaken under battlefield conditions. Few people prosper from a nightmare.

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

Much later, during what the Maestro calls The Jehovah Era (which is—forgive these rough historical estimates—from 1200 B.C. to the advent of Jesus Christ) the D.K. not only disbursed a host of awards and punishments (occasionally by way of miracles) but more often through dreams, He would

succeed in arousing visions in prophets and plebians alike. Thereby, He could drive His wards on many a chosen route, often, I suspect, on not much more than an imperious whim.

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

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

become aware of how he or she possesses less courage, less loyalty, less devotion, less love, or less health than previously assumed. The dream can now serve as a protective system to warn a man or woman away from situations they cannot dominate or even tolerate.

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

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

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

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

Zelinger—the Old Farmer. On such was the name given him by neighboring parents.

Der Alte was an enigma. This old man was a hermit and highly mysterious. He could also be as mean as a winter wind, but on special occasions he might seem approachable like any other purportedly warm old fellow. The parents in Hefeld, having known him for decades, knew better. Nonetheless, he was the only agriculturalist within a day's walk in any direction and commanded more than a little tradition about beekeeping.

-2-

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

I will go so far as to say that on this occasion, I was deft. Given the knowledge absorbed from the milk runs, I knew that Alois would soon be visiting this neighboring beekeeper, Der Alte, also known as Der Alte

Zauberer—the Old Sorcerer. Or such was the name given him by neighboring peasants.

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

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

As a matter of style, when it comes to dream-work, I have always been inclined to avoid baroque virtuositities. Modest scenarios are usually more effective. In this case, I satisfied myself by producing as close a presentation of Der Alte's face and voice as I could manage and then placed him into Adi's dream. For the setting, I used an image of one of the two rooms of the old

man's hut, and made the yard visible through the window. The action of the dream could not have been more direct. As Der Alte led them inside his quarters, he fed Adi a spoonful of honey. I made certain the taste was exquisite on the boy's tongue. Adi awakened with wet pajamas from navel to knee and a whole sense of happiness. Stripping his wet night-clothing, a not unusual event, he went back into slumber, replaying the dream with his own small variations, looking to taste the honey again. In his mind, he was certain that he would soon meet Der Alte, and this emboldened him to ask his father to take him along next morning. Alois, as I have remarked, was pleased.

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

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

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

No surprise then that Adi, etched by the dream, was marked by the visit. His expectation that he would often be able to picture in advance people he had not yet met, would become an asset for us.

We would exercise this device often during Adolf Hitler's service as an Army courier over the two years and more when he had to carry messages up

to the trenches, then work his way back to Regimental Headquarters. Since his duties incurred real danger, his belief that he could anticipate the future, proved of no small assistance to his courage. Too soon to speak of that, however. His experiences as a soldier—a most complex amalgam of our magic, and his desperation and dedication—remain eighteen years away. For now, I will leave this discussion of dream-etching until it is necessary to discuss the practice again.

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

-3-

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

subject of personal interest until Alois-Junior and Angela worked with him on the farm. Now, most unexpectedly, he did feel a sense of something not ordinary coming to him from this little one.

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

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

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

"They go very far back, Father?"

Alois gave him an encouraging pat on the nape of his neck. The boy's obvious desire to keep the conversation in flow now served to activate Alois'

funds of exposition. "Yes, far back. Maybe even for a longer time than us. And there has never been a day when we didn't look to steal their honey." He laughed. "Back in the time of the Bronze Age, already we were eating honey, yes, and I can say for certain that I have seen old drawings in glass cases right there in the old Linz museum, going back into the Middle Ages, that show how beekeeping had already become a serious activity. Although wild, very wild then."

Despite his touch of rheumatism, Alois was certainly walking fast. Adi's breath was now seizing his lungs in a unique mixture of happy fervor at the fact of the conversation itself, and the desperation that he might not be able to keep walking (half-running) at his father's pace. So many unfamiliar words were coming into his mind at once. This past August, while standing under the walnut tree nearest their farmhouse, a gale of wind came by like the crack of a whip, whereupon three walnuts, hard as stone, had pelted his head with such authority that he did not even dare to cry—it was as if the walnuts told him to be silent. Now, he was buffeted by the Bronze Age, and next, the Middle Ages—maybe he had heard "Middle Ages before". He felt as if he

might know it. Charlemagne, maybe. No question of stopping to ask—he strode along as fast as he could, the air burning in his lungs.

"They had," said Alois, "no hives in the Middle Ages. They had to go out hunting to where they could find a swarm of bees gathered together. Where? Where else? In hollow trees. Locate such a tree, and then grab what you can of the honey before the bees sting your head off. That was how good men must have done it then. Only, that was not enough. They also had to scoop up the wax. This beeswax was just as important. With beeswax, you could have light for your hut. Every night. Candles! But, oh, they had to pay. So many bites. Then along would come their Duke or their Baron. If he heard about your honey, you had to pay up. A good share he took. Imagine. What do you think he gave you back?—a bow, a nice strong cross-bow. Why? Because the bears in the forest were also looking for honey. Think how crazy those bees must have got when a bear stuck his nose right in to lap up their hive. It is one thing to sting a man, but how do you stop a bear? A bear with his thick skin! They had to go for the eyes. It didn't matter. The bear would still come looking. So, a man needed a cross-bow—to kill the bear. Not so easy to go near honey if the bear got there first, but you could have

compensation. Sometimes you had bear meat. Once in a while, you had bear meat and honey."

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

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

"What about the bears? Would they come?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Goodbye."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

-4-

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

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

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

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

One could hardly expect him to be impressive in his person, yet he is.

Undeniably. His eyes are extraordinary, as blue as the coldest skies of the north, yet full of lights that offer a clue to many a trick he has learned.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

learn about these bees and their good keeping." He sighed with a sound of woe physically intimidating in its resonance.

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

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

"Given your gracious permission, I would say that I must caution you about your honorable and honest desire to enter the endless vagaries of apiculture. It is, you see, a vocation." He nodded. He turned again to Adi as if the boy was one more equal, yes, all three sitting there quite alike in implicit stature. "You, little fellow," Der Alte said, "you, who looks so smart, are you smart enough to know what a vocation might be?"

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

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

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

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

"Dear sir, it cannot and will not ever be that way," said Der Alte. "That much I can promise a strong person like yourself. Heartbreak or happiness. Nothing between." He nodded with all the profundity of the decades he had continued to present himself as a great and learned doctor. "Herr Hitler, I cannot allow you to consider such a project until you are made fully aware of the risks that await you, the diseases and mortal enemies that surround our delicate sweet-seeking bees. After all, the honey they make is to the world of

nature an exact equivalent of gold. So many of the creatures of nature, large and small, are jealous of the life of these remarkable little creatures who are not only able to make honey but dwell constantly amidst that golden and intoxicating presence. In consequence, honey-bees are hated. They are pursued and entrapped. I can inform you of one genus of spider who is evil, nothing less. Die Krabbe-Spinne, it is called. So soon as it finds a promising flower, this creature ensconces itself deep within the small perfumed cavern of the bloom. There the crab-spider waits. I would suppose he even feels at home. He proceeds to activate the scent of this flower by stirring about in those blessed folds of the corolla; soon, the spider's own awful odor is concealed by the intoxicating elixir of the petals. What then? The crab-spider waits. When the forager-bee, our sweet hard-working female with its undeveloped ovaries—only the Queen, as we know, is completely in possession of that most mysterious avatar of female existence!—ach, these other females are there to work for the length of their short lives. So here, contemplate this poor little forager. Our honey-bee smells the inimitable redolence of the flower's cavern. She enters, full of greed, to pick up her lusty store of nectar and pollen and, at once, she is done in. Cruelly! Sadistically!

For, the poor bee is not killed, but is certainly half-gone. She has been paralyzed by a sting from the crab-spider, and so must stay there, numb and incapable of saving herself, whereupon the spider, altogether without mercy, proceeds to sup on the vital liquids and subtle constituents of the bee's internal elements. When nothing is left but the dry whisper of a husk, this crab spider goes to the actual labor of ejecting the remains from the flower, after which, it ensconces itself in all the bliss of sleep, yes, a successful destroyer's slumbers, sated, all sated, in the corolla."

Adi would dream for weeks of the bee, the flower, and more than one evil bug. More came his way. Der Alte described the bee-wolf, a wasp who would strike at the honeybee just as it was alighting on a flower. The bee-wolf would always go for the throat. "Always. The honeybee has a soft throat. So once again, our forager is paralyzed. The wasp is now in complete command. She proceeds to squash the belly of the honeybee in order to disgorge all the nectar that hard-working little being has already taken into herself. This nectar squeezed up from the belly overflows out of the bee's mouth into the maw of the bee-wolf. Is that enough? No. This female brute is now ready for the labor of flying off with her stricken victim. She transports this paralyzed and

ruptured little creature to a nest most specially prepared. There, she lays her capture down next to as many as six or eight still-living but wholly stricken other honey-bees caught earlier. Then the wasp deposits into this same crypt one egg, one solitary egg who will soon feed on these live, but unmoving bees. After which, this larvae, now well-fed is ready to come forth as one more bee-wolf. While it is apparent that the stricken bodies served as nutrients for her growth, and were ingested, limb by limb, how were these bees able to live long enough to serve as living food, piece by piece? And the answer is to be found in our so-called good and wise system of nature which also demonstrates here all the cunning of the cruelest maniac. It is the venom in the wasp's sting that has preserved the flesh of these paralyzed bees, and kept them alive for days while one hungry little wasp-to-be became a bee-wolf.

"I have offered these two exceptional cases as lively examples of the perils to the life of any colony you may hope to protect. There are so many enemies. A skunk will fret his claws on the front wall of a hive until the guardian bees within must come forth to repel him. These soldier-guards are heroic, but futile. They are swallowed en masse. Toads wait beneath to pick up the droppings. Another variety of spider will wrap cocoons about each bee

that happens to fly right into its web. Ants may invade your hive. I have seen colonies where the bees are obliged to tolerate the ants, and will even surrender a portion of their territory in order that these indefatigable invaders do not attack the combs that hold the future brood. With mice, it is worse. In summer, they loot the combs directly for the honey. In winter, they move into the hive seeking warmth, then proceed to construct a mouse-nest in one or another corner. The most valiant of our home guard attack the intruder, and can on occasion succeed through the force of sheer numbers. It is not impossible. They can sting to death the invading monster. A glorious victory. But what can they then do with the carcass? For them, it is larger than Leviathan. Just so soon as the mouse begins to decompose, the hive becomes intolerable. So the bees proceed to cover this rotting presence with disinfectant. Contemplate their fabulous skill. They have managed to manufacture this now necessary substance from pollen plus a few chosen green buds. Have you heard of it? Propolis?"

"Of course," said Alois. "They also know to use propolis for mending cracks in their walls." He was pleased with himself now.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For the first time, he felt as if he had a grasp on Der Alte. The hermit understood him better than others, decided Alois. "He knows that I am a man who looks to keep his pride intact. I do not give way to the first warning. So

Der Alte must know that the more he discourages me, the more I will be ready to begin my colony. He will have his money after all."

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

"Not quite yet, said Der Alte. "If you wish to remain a man with a modest little hobby, I will, of course, be available for necessary materials. But I see in you, Sir, if I may speak on a more personal level, the possibility of a true vocation. So, I would propose another consideration, a better approach. To learn my metier, I put in an apprenticeship that continued for three years, but provided me with an advanced license. What I would propose to you is a more collegial relationship—may I put it so?—I am prepared over the next few years, for the most modest fees, to have you associated with me as I work on my colonies. It could prove an agreeable arrangement. You will learn much, and I will have the pleasure of an intelligent man's company. It is sad to say, but in all these verdant fields that surround our Hafeld, we are the only two individuals of outstanding intelligence."

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

In turn, I was horrified. No professional has a greater desire for competence than a devil. I had been incompetent here. Der Alte might be a pensioner, but I had neglected him for too long. The loneliness revealed in these last remarks was like the chill of an unoccupied house. How intense was the old man's yearning to see more of Adi. No bold move is ever free of unplanned turns. Calculated mischief might be our province, but such indulgence should not be there for a client. Not if we can prevent it. We look to direct the romantic habits of our fold, rather than have to correct them. Any future episode between the old man and the boy would not be to the Maestro's liking. Too many indeterminables!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

-5-

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

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

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

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

It was at this point that I was ordered to leave Adi and the other members of the family as well as my other clients in that area of Austria—none of whom need concern us. They were, however, numerous enough for me to deputize three of my agents to remain while I left with the others for St.

Petersburg where we would embark on a massive oncoming project. We would attend the Coronation of Tsar Nicholas the Second, scheduled for May of 1896 in Moscow, an event still these many months away.

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

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

I will now make an apology, although I will do my best not to repeat it. (Good readers do not read fiction, after all, to put up with the author's regrets.)

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

-6-

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

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

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

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

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

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

-7-

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

Being in Russia, I had no time to attend to this. Short of forcing a direct entrance into Alois' waking thoughts which, it may be remembered, is rarely done with men and women who are not our clients, my agents had to work by way of their milk runs. In what our Maestro chooses to call "the markets of sleep," most dreams of men and women are reasonably open to devils and Cudgels alike, and so their daily thoughts can be picked up in superficial degree by no more than passing through the night chamber.

We also learn a good deal through the simple expedient of listening to a family's chatter. To be sure, a plethora of superficial information now arrived,

more than enough to annoy me. It was a biased portrait. My agents perceived Alois as weak and much too worried, but they lacked insight for dealing with men or women who possess strength, yet are being studied during a time of anxiety. It is easy to comprehend people who are weaker than ourselves, but it is not as simple to be ready for the true feelings of those more powerful. A sense of nuance is demanded, precisely what my locals were lacking.

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

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

His first concern (which I find comic—since he has spent his life in uniform) is that he has to remind himself constantly to put on light-colored gloves and a bee-keeper's large hat and veil, always of the whitest material.

Since he must avoid dark coats or trousers, when that is his customary dress, he is always concerned in these first days to remember to change his garments before going out to the hive-boxes. Deep and somber colors, he knows all too well, do irritate bees. He knows that by experience. On the particular occasion some years ago when he had been gravely stung while working with the little colony he then kept near Braunau, he had made the mistake of inviting an attractive woman out with him one Sunday afternoon. As an element in his plan of seduction, he thought he would demonstrate not only his competence with the hive, but his elegance. Therefore, he was in full dress dark blue uniform. That twilight he was stung so fiercely that the recollection still rises from the pit of his stomach. Alois' hopes of fornication were obliged to remain unsatisfied that Sunday since the lady was stung as well, and on no less than the exposed flesh of her ample breast. Only a passing romance was lost, but a blow was given to his best opinion of himself. As we see, he continues to pay the price. Dressed in white, shoots of fear, bright as rockets, fire off nonetheless in his stomach as he approaches the hive boxes.

In some part, however, Alois remains a good peasant. He has not forgotten that one must remain on the alert after any small disaster.

Unexpected value can be gained at times from the misfortune. His interesting medical theses, for example, were stimulated by the alleviation of his rheumatism on the following day—bee stings did seem to be good for his knees. When their meeting occurred, Der Alte, we remember, was ready to agree.

This confirmation could have been part of Alois' decision to accept Der Alte's opinion that imported Italian bees were superior to the Austrian variety. While Alois had his suspicion that Der Alte might be selling exactly some stock that he wished to get rid of, still, the telling point was that Italian bees were easier to handle. They were gentler, Der Alte assured him. Moreover, their rich yellow tan, not unlike the mellow glow of the best shoe leather, made them more beautiful. Alois had to admire the three golden segments of their bodies, each set off by the sharpest edging in black. Chic! That was the word that came to mind. Whereas the Austrian honey-bee was gray and hairy. It did not gleam like these gilded Italians. Afterward, Alois felt as if he had been disloyal. He should have taken the "Franz Josefs," the gray-beards.

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

Through these months, therefore, he would have to take the temperature within the hive every day. He had even been advised to record the daily and weekly data. Yet, he must not open any hive. "No matter your curiosity," Der Alte had confided, "you must not allow yourself to peer in, or extract any of the movable frames for study of the combs. The cold draft that could result from lifting the large lid of the box might so lower the temperature that your bees would need hours to warm the interior again. Such a chill could decimate your population. Take no chances, Herr Hitler. Until now, from what you have told me, I assume that in the past, you have lived with bees only in June and July. Any tourist can do that. But to be the Skipper of your little people through the ice-cold air of all the winter months to come, that takes character, my friend." And then as if to enrich the assumption, he added, "My new friend."

-8-

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

What Alois saved in work, he spent in worry. He was still under sixty, damn it, not yet sixty by a year and more, but he had such a sense of inner weariness before these new responsibilities. His two populated boxes were

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My agents kept providing me with these petty episodes, but I was growing testy. They were missing the depth of Alois' new anxieties. So soon as his visitor left, Alois felt so alone with his project that he began to wonder whether disease might strike the colonies.

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

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

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

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

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

She knew immediately what was coming next. Herr Rostenmeier was the owner of the country store in Fischlham where once a week, on Saturday, she and Angela would buy a few foodstuffs they did not raise in their garden.

Klara liked Mr. Rostenmeier, and had begun to talk to him about the future sale of their honey. Alois had told her not to make any deals, not yet, because the possibility was still there that he would do business with Der Alte. So, she had taken pleasure in the thought that maybe it would yet be Herr Rostenmeier, and in that case she could be the person in-between, and bring a little money back to the house from the local sales. Her fingers tingled each time she thought of such a transaction.

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

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

"Yes, yes," said Klara, "but you told me you don't trust Der Alte. Yes?" She was close to becoming hysterical. To be torn out of an agreeable sleep for this! "Yes, you say you don't trust him, and yet you are still ready to choose this Der Alte over an honest man like Herr Rostenmeier?"

"Klara, this is all because you feel embarrassed," he told her. "Maybe you had a little too much conversation with Herr Rostenmeier already."

Something you haven't mentioned, could it be? A real commitment. Without speaking to me first."

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

-9-

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

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

"Yes," he kept saying to himself, "I will not be afraid to walk there. But not in the night, maybe not. There are too many spirits in the woods then."

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

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

"Can we," asked Der Alte, "ever pay enough attention to this work of Creation? It is so full of genius. These little devils come to us from the Good Lord's divine and curious aesthetic—nature's wisdom expressing itself in this most bizarre form. Are we being given a hint of God's secret rites."

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

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

Alois managed finally to interject a word.

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

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

"Spring," said Der Alte. "It is necessary to wait until spring." Then, given the disappointment on the boy's face, he shrugged. "All right," he said,

"but you must be prepared. It is winter. Bees are sluggish during these months."

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

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

Now, these bees could just as well have been beans bumping around in a heated pot, except, no, beans did not look so nervous. What an awful way to live! They miss the sun, the boy thought, and flying in the garden. Now they

were just shoved up against each other. He sighed in preference to bursting into tears. Could these bees breathe?

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

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

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

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

This was of slight interest to me. I queried my agents about their own ideas about what they could glean from the bee's thoughts, and some of it seemed of value. That night, Adi had heard his father complain that the screen protecting the hive entrance had been torn. The entrance was small, but all the same, a mouse might have made use of the hole. Aldo's men decided that this was unlikely—the hole was simply not large enough—but Adi was not convinced. When his father had replaced the screen the next afternoon, Adi no longer knew as he sat between the boxes which one might be occupied by the queen. Even he

-10-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

These are not good conditions for our work. Openings, however, do present themselves, particularly when the drinkers are staggering home. We are ready then. Sometimes, disgusted at the hours lost, we even slam them to the ground. They usually take it personally, their lament most characteristic. "Somebody shoved me," they often cry out. Nobody believes them, but they know better. Wrath had struck between the shoulder blades, and it was not their own rage, not at all.

-11-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

defecation. Alois stepped it off. Yes, you could even find these yellow spots one hundred paces away from the hive boxes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What about him?"

"He still does it in his pants."

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

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

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

"Oh, you think you know it all already," Angela said, "but you don't.

There is a secret word as well. I was told the word."

"By who? By my mother?"

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

"Who told you?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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