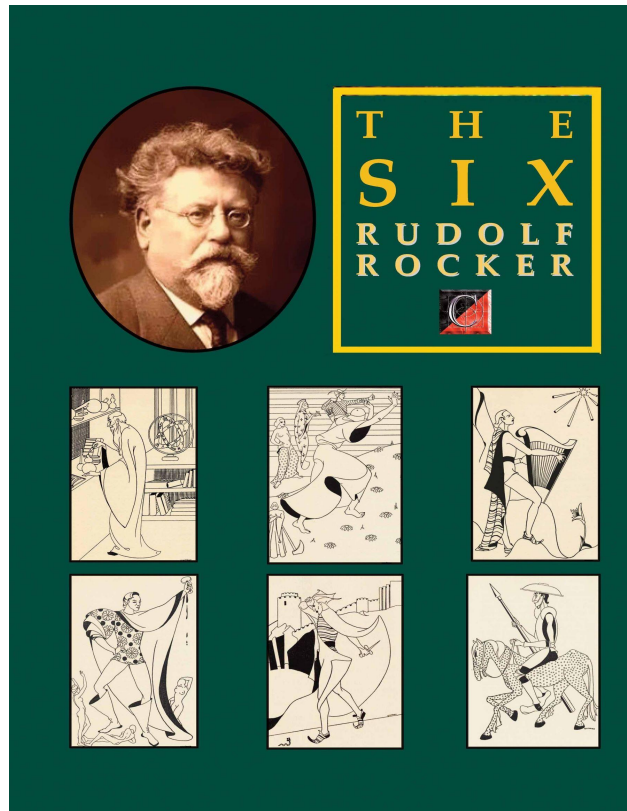


The Six

Rudolf Rocker



March 1938

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introductory note on **The Six**

In The Six Rudolf Rucker has taken some well-known figures from world literature and done two things with them: first he has made them live again, and then he has made them, serve a purpose of his own; without doing violence in any way to the traditional character of any one of them, he has used them to introduce a beautiful dream of a world rebuilt and mankind set free.

He begins with a picture: At the edge of a boundless desert we gaze on a black marble sphinx, whose eyes are fixed immovably on something beyond the far horizon, and about whose eternally silent lips there plays a scornful smile, as if she were gloating over her unguessed riddle. Six roads coming from widely separated lands converge and end on the sands before her outstretched paws. Along each road a wanderer moves.

These wanderers, the six figures from world literature, are presented in three contrasting pairs.

First pair:

Faust, who burns himself out in ascetic brooding over the mystery of life, exhausts himself in the vain endeavor to trace its origin and its end, to find in it a meaning and a purpose, makes at last the traditional bargain with Satan—his soul in exchange for another life span and an answer to his question—and wakes at last to the realization that his second span is spent, and that all that he has had is some trivial, transitory pleasures, and all that he still has is his old question, still unanswered.

Contrasted with him, Don Juan, who declares that life is not a thing to be examined and understood, but to be lived and enjoyed; who says, knowledge is unattainable, if attained, it would be useless; pleasure is real and is sweet. It is fleeting, but it can always be found anew. I will pursue it, scorning any knowledge but what it brings me, defying every law and custom that would restrict my enjoyment. Thus speaking, thinking thus, he lives his life; drains pleasure to the dregs; comes to know that what he is draining is but dregs; at last, burned out by his lust, reaches his end, knowing that all that he has had is transient triumph and all that he still has is his defiant pride.

The second pair:

Hamlet, who, seeing the cruelties, the horrors, the follies of the world and finding them unendurable, flees from them.

Don Quixote, who, seeing the same cruelties, horrors, and follies, sets out with a rusty sword and a broken lance to do battle with them.

The third pair:

The monk, Medardus—created by Hoffmann to carry the legend of the devil's elixir—who quaffs the elixir and gives himself up to many forms of mystic sin.

The bard, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, whose songs are inspired by an equally mystic holiness.

These are the six wanderers who move along the separate roads, to fall at last, exhausted and defeated, in the sand at the feet of the sphinx — who heeds them not at all.

Year follows year into the ocean of eternity. The sphinx still broods on the desert sands—

And then a new day dawns. One by one the wanderers awake. Earnest sage and frivolous reveler arise and greet each other. The melancholy Prince of Denmark and the noble and imaginative Knight of La Mancha; the devil-ridden monk and the angel-inspired singer, face one another on the

desert sands. They talk together and resolve their differences. The dawn advances, the desert turns to greensward, the sphinx dissolves into dust. A new day is at hand—but no summary will serve to convey this picture that Rocker has drawn of *The Awakening*.

In two things I have reveled as I worked at my task of translation:

*In the completeness of understanding with which Rocker has identified himself with each of his characters in turn, thinking his thoughts and feeling his feelings and giving dramatic and satisfying expression to them all. (It seems to me that he has done this most impressively with the convincing, defiant sensualism of *Don Juan* and the unanswerable, gloomy logic of *Hamlet*.)*

And in the incomparable beauty of the slightly archaic German prose.

*The language of musicians is to me an unknown tongue, so the words I am about to use will likely all be wrong. But *The Six* seems to me like a great symphony. There is a short introduction, a prelude, which sets a theme, sad and enigmatic. This theme is repeated after each of the six movements which make up the body of the symphony. Each movement has its own mood and tempo. After the last repetition of the introductory theme there comes a jubilant, resolving finale. Probably musicians have a name for such things. I have none; I merely know that the whole work affects me like a great orchestral performance.*

The Six, as we have it now, is the final and finished outgrowth of a lecture, which became a set of lectures, then a book. I think nothing reveals more convincingly, not only Rocker's literary skill, but also his great power as an orator, than the fact that he could make those lectures real and impressive to new audiences of untaught workers—to the half-literate sailors whom he met in a British internment camp during the World War, for instance. That he did this is made clear by the fact that he was called upon to repeat the lectures again and again. That he did not achieve this success by talking down to the cultural level of his hearers is shown by the fact that the scholars and writers who were also among the interned men were equally impressed and equally eager for the repetition.

*Men and women who heard him give the *Hamlet-Don Quixote* antiphony in London have described to me the response of his auditors—shrinking down in their seats, grasping tensely at the edges of their chairs, as, with drawn faces, they sank beneath the devastating logic of *Hamlet's* philosophy of despair; sitting forward, hands on their chair seats, feet drawn back as if about to spring from their places, when, with upturned faces they watched the valiant Don ride forth against evil giants transformed by magic into the guise of windmills. The reader of the book finds himself equally swayed by the author's changing moods.*

None of Rocker's works seems to me to hit a higher level of artistry than this; none has made me feel so deeply the inadequacy of my rendering.

Ray E. Chase.
Los Angeles, March 11, 1938.

The Six

The heaven is gray. The desert yawns.

A mighty sphinx of smooth black marble lies outstretched upon the waste of fine brown sand, her gaze lost in dreary, infinite remoteness.

Nor hate nor love dwells in that gaze; her eyes are misted, as by some deep dream, and over her dumb lips' cold pride there hovers, gently smiling, just eternal silence.

Six roads lead to the image of the sphinx, six roads that come from distant lands to reach the self-same goal.

Along each road a wanderer moves, close-wrapped in Fate's grim curse, with forehead marked by a power not his own, striding on-ward toward some distant world glimpsed faint on the horizon, such wide, wide worlds away in space, so very near in mind.

I The First Road

THE city rests amid soft hills. Its ancient pinnacles glow with red and gold from the setting sun. Thick walls with strong towers enclose the motley tangle of narrow streets and alleys that wind and cross as lawlessly as the paths of a garden maze. And it seems as if every alley hides its special secret, for whose solution the uninitiated seeks in vain. In gloomy corners and around the gray projections of the old gable-roofed houses broods the long, long past, by time forgotten.

The old fountain in the marketplace murmurs softly, just as it did years and years ago. The massive shadow of the old cathedral rests on the silent square which today seems so abandoned by the world. Only a withered old woman stands lonely by the ancient fountain, dreaming of vanished times that will never come again.

Spring has come suddenly into the land to put an abrupt end to the tyranny of a long winter. The radiant sky and the young green of the pastures and meadows have lured the people out before the city gates, and joyous crowds seethe or stroll unrestrained in the warm rays of the bright spring sun, which have thawed all the numbness that had bound their hearts. Young and old, great and small, have journeyed forth into the open today to shake the dust from their souls and prove themselves unharmed by the gray monotony of the gloomy winter days.

Now it is getting evening, and the tones of ancient bells peal solemnly through the mild air, warning the town folks that it is time to turn homeward. Through the city gates stream troops of happy human beings, laden with bouquets of flowers and bunches of greenery, and the cheerful sound of song fills the air. The ancient streets are filled with lively, chattering groups, strolling leisurely and with light hearts toward their dwellings, till with the gathering darkness life slowly dies out in the streets and squares.

The last rays of the departing sun have now long faded out, and the mild spring night spreads its pinions soundlessly over the abandoned nooks and alleys, which glimmer strangely in the moonlight.

The glow of lamps has gradually vanished from the tiny windows. Only here and there a lonely light still sends its beam into the silence of the night. Perhaps a sick man lies there fighting against his pain or a dying man commends his tired soul to God.

Profound and solemn peace hangs over the slumbering houses, interrupted from time to time only by the stern strokes of the old cathedral clock and the alert horn of the watchman.

On a little height in the heart of the dreaming city there rises an age-old, stately building that seems even stranger and older than the houses round about it. At the narrow Gothic window of a tower room sits an old man with long white hair and flowing beard, gazing, lost in dreams, away across the gables of ancient roofs shimmering green in the pale moonlight.

The heavy oaken table in the middle of the room is overflowing with books and papers piled together in a confused heap. Along the faded walls stretch long shelves covered with rare speci-

mens and strange instruments. A cunningly wrought oil lamp fills the room with its feeble glow, which strives in vain to penetrate into the gloomy corners of the apartment.

With a weary gesture the old man sweeps the hair back from his brow and murmurs thoughtfully into his beard:

Now all is once again as silent as the grave, and above the sleepers arches as of old the vault of infinite space in which millions of worlds whirl unceasing in their course. May their slumber be refreshing to the just, and undisturbed by frightening dreams! And for whom could that be possible! For lives that turn always about the pitiful needs of the hour and that never try to build bridges into eternity. Well for them! The Creator has not made them too exacting. It is not easy to disturb their equilibrium. They are thus safeguarded from the hellish torment of an anguished urge that gnaws at the heart like an ever-hungry worm.

I feel it in my blood like a creeping poison at this time, when unfathomable Nature writhes in the pangs of rebirth, and new life bursts from myriad fountains in forms and patterns that are endlessly new. Then spring also goes slowly on her way, summer and autumn gradually vanish, and grim winter once more wraps everything in a shroud. And then the same old game begins again. Who can fathom the profound meaning of this eternal becoming and wasting away, in which life and death are so strangely mingled and every end is pregnant with a new beginning?

Is death in fact an end, or only a beginning, or at the same time end and beginning in the vast cycle of events? Where is the boundary that separates the has been from the about to be? Where the vast First Cause from which all being springs?

The more I work at this dark riddle the more do I appear a stranger to myself. I am seized with mystic dread of my own nature, which lies before my eyes as difficult and enigmatic as the dumb eternity of infinite space itself.

Whence come we? Whither do we go? Did I exist even before my mother's body swelled with a new life? Shall I go on when once the last spark of this existence has faded like a dying flame?

There is in us so much of the dark and mysterious, lying deep-hidden in our souls and never rising to the surface to be seen. What we are able to tell one another about the petty cares of every day and the tiny bits of joy that all too seldom fall to our lot, does not go very deep and affects us little more than mechanical movements performed unconsciously. But the things which slumber in the depths do not seek to reveal themselves; they lie at the bottom of the mind where obscure, primitive forces trace their silent cycles and never emerge into the light of day.

In the depths lie all those hard, strange things which cause a tightness in the throat when sometimes a note, torn loose, strays out of the abyss, a dumb and nameless thing threatens to acquire speech. In the depths, too, are rooted the walls which we erect between us, those walls dividing man from man in whose shadow unspeakable loneliness and nameless longing creep softly on their way. But the last and deepest

depth is never revealed to us; what lies there always sedulously shuns the luring caresses of the outer world.

Even where, in the burning fire of sex, quivering body presses against body and two souls seem to fuse in the mad tumult of passion, there still lingers something strange, lurking dumb in the background of feeling, so that not every word shall be uttered, not every deepest, quavering lust shall be allayed. Even where love lies drunk with ecstasy there still glimmers always in the vague depths of thought a threatening enigmatic, Who knows?

Yes, if it were granted to us to look on the Creator in his workshop, to see the beginning and the end of all things, then perhaps we should also know what it is that lies hidden beyond that thin wall that hems in the brain, where furtive thoughts crowd one another in its narrow space and lurk unsuspected in its secret places. Then the meaning of life would no longer be for us a sealed book. But what boots here all our grubbing! We poor wretches clutch with our thoughts at the mere surface of events and are always blindest just when we think we have found enlightenment.

I sit so many an anxious night in this dreary house, turning over in my poor brain world-embracing thoughts that are to bring me release from this everlasting torment—

Release? O gracious Virgin, Thou pure and blessed one who dwellest there above by God's own sacred throne! Of thy consecrated body was born the Savior who brought to men release from the curse of sin. But it seems no savior was born for me; for no deliverer ever quenches the burning fire of intense longing in my breast.

Ah, how much easier it is to free man from his petty sins than from the whirling thoughts which clamor for understanding and hover, brooding, over unfathomable abysses! Will the hour of release ever strike for this great longing, that hungers for a revelation and senselessly gnaws at itself in dull torment?

The fulfillment of all my yearning once circled about my head like a shining star, but with the coming of the burden of the years it has fled ever farther into the distance and has left only desert wastes behind.

While youth still steeled my body and I looked at life with eyes undimmed, I dreamed of an exalted hour when all the knots with which Fate had bound me would come asunder in my hands. With eager impulse my mind pounced on everything that human intellect has brought forth, and sought in ancient books and systems for the final goal of wisdom. But every time that yearning saw a gate before it, the mind glimpsed its final goal on the horizon, it proved just another beginning, anxious and difficult, a will-o'-the-wisp dancing mockingly over graves.

And in the silent course of years there ripened in me the certainty that all our knowledge does not help us to grasp the ultimate meaning of things. Like the blind, we go always round and round in circles. We stride off toward a distant goal and

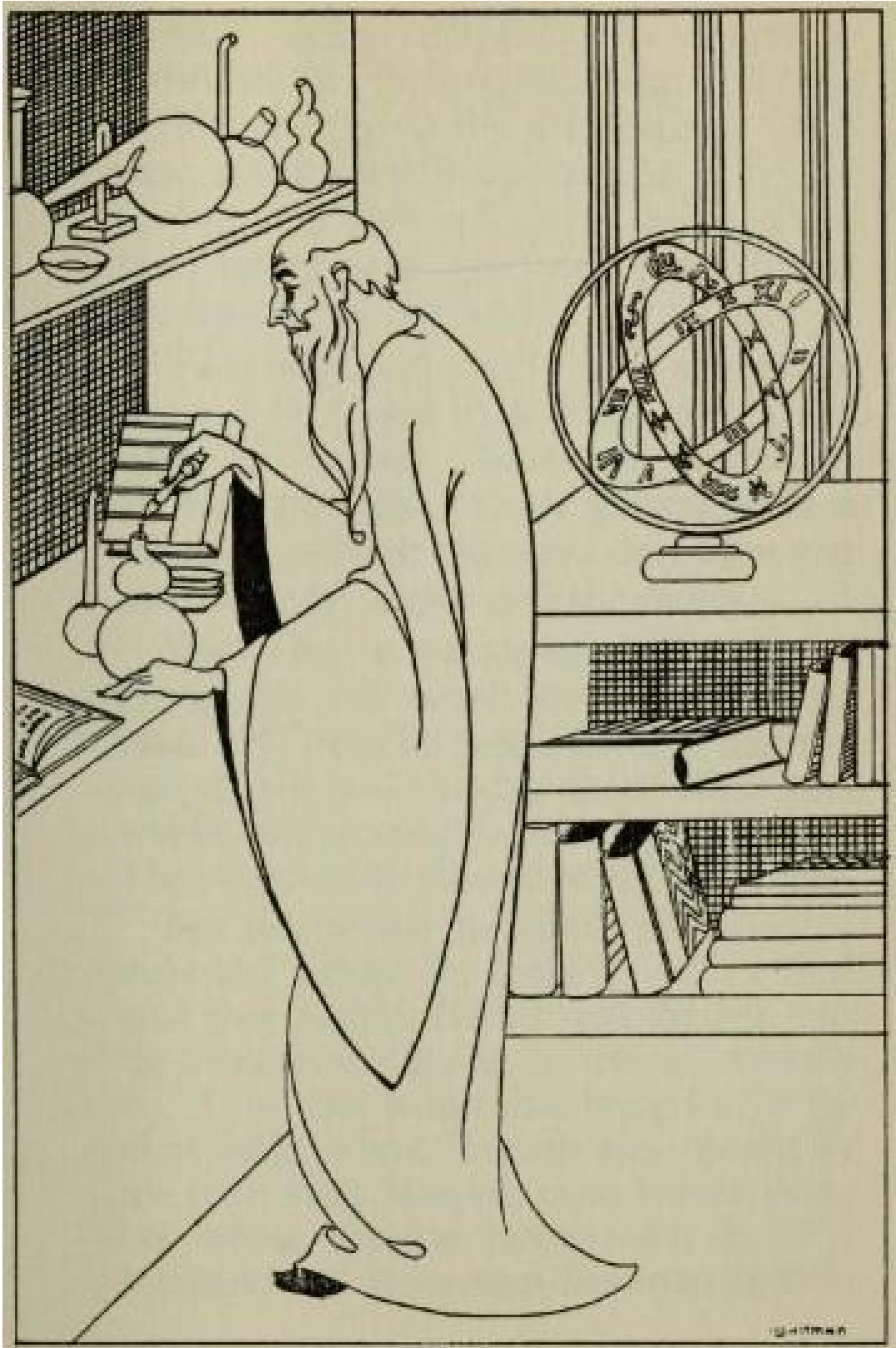
come back always to the same old place.

Are there perhaps on some other of the worlds that whirl and roll so strangely through the depths of eternal, all-embracing space also beings which, as on this earth, hunger for understanding and, obedient to that fierce urge, burn themselves out in hellish torment and heavenly bliss?

It often seems to me that out of the immeasurably far away I catch the silent rhythm of those worlds that have their paths off there in the depths of space. It sinks like a mighty chord into my soul: I think I hear the harmony of the spheres, and all existence suddenly seems clear to me.. But scarcely have I moved a hand to bind this inner experience fast with words, when the momentary spell is shattered like a bursting bubble; desolate void gapes at me on every hand.

And still it never leaves me, that great yearning that feeds on my heart's blood, that passionate longing that cries for understanding; it never leaves me, though I always do but march from disappointment to disappointment. Even today, when the portals of the tomb already gape for this worn body, the great yearning will not be stilled. Almost it seems as if the silent torment grows yet stronger. Why, oh, why?

And I was always so pious! An undeviating herald of Thy glory!



Then from a dusky corner of the room a merry peal of laughter assailed the old man's ear, and a voice spoke:

You fool! You old fool! Already you are feeling in your rotting limbs the cold touch of death, and still you can't give up your madness. Have you never recognized your deepest nature? All your life you have fancied yourself pious, yet you have never been pious. Do you know what true piety means? A man is pious from indwelling impulse and obeys implicitly the divine command. He does not calculate, makes no reservations, is not plagued by the heat of dumb desires that lurk slyly in the depths and burn for fulfillment.

For you piety is only a means to a special end. You praise the glory of your Creator, follow faithfully the commandments which He has given you, but deep within you gnaws the delusion that some time, as a reward, understanding will come to you, and God will draw back the veil from before your eyes and reveal to you the meaning of His works.

Vain hope, old man! You are letting yourself be fooled by a dream which can never be fulfilled. Your gaze is fixed on an airy phantom, which glitters with a thousand brilliant colors but only lures you treacherously deeper into the desert.

Your God is jealous as a Mussulman; knowledge will never come to you from Him. He trembles before his own creature and already sees the day ahead when man will be able to revolt against His dominion. Then it would be all over with His divinity.

For this reason he blinds the mind of man and mocks his longing with a final goal that recedes farther and farther into the distance the harder he tries to overtake it. Thus man is like that being in the ancient fable, whose feverish eyes constantly see fresh fruit hanging close before them, but whose lips can never reach it. For thousands of years man has been held in leading strings, but he never notices how basely he is tricked.

You are on the wrong road, old man! If you wish for knowledge, you must knock at my door—

The voice ceases, a gentle rustling goes through the apartment.

Who speaks to me? inquires the old man, with trembling voice, and piercingly there sounds from a corner:

Who speaks to you? Man calls me the Power of Darkness because I stole fire from heaven to bring light to the sons of earth. He has called me the Prince of Liars because I first whispered truth in his ear.

One little word had its origin in my mind, the unpretentious word Why? With this word I greeted your distant ancestors as they stepped across the threshold that separates the human from the beast. The word bored into their dumb brains and sank to the bottom of their minds like a heavy weight.

Unending human herds threw themselves in the dust before a thousand gods, castigated their bodies, groaned in torment under the curse of sin. I was a witness of their anguish of mind, and merely asked the one word: Why?

The enslaved brood of men toiled in the sweat of their brows to build pyramids and citadels, which were to transmit the names of their masters to the latest generations. I looked on the madness of these serfs and asked them merely: Why?

Yet there were times when the word that lay there at the bottom of their minds suddenly burst forth in bright red flame. Then the spirit seized them. Gods plunged from their holy places, thrones tumbled in the gutter, and chains broke that had been forged for eternity. But this did not last long. The love of the lash lay in their blood, and their shoulders yearned for a new yoke.

Who speaks to you? I am the spirit that once showed itself to your mother in Paradise and implored her to stretch out her hand for the fruit of the tree of knowledge. I whispered in her ear: God doth know that on the day that ye eat thereof your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

Was it my fault that he thrust your parents out of Paradise like dogs, cursed the earth that it should not nourish them, and gave them over to slavery and death?

Once more the voice is stilled. A shudder runs through the old man's worn-out body; from his lips there sounds, dead and heavy:

Satan, it is you who speak to me. Are you trying to lead my soul into temptation, to trick me to my damnation? The keenness of your logic frightens me! And yet my whole being cries out to you. Do you not promise me knowledge and understanding? My old wounds begin to bleed; my heart burns again with tormenting questions; and desires that I thought had long been buried struggle up from the depths of my soul in burning eagerness. They burn me like consuming fire, and my soul writhes with their thousand torments. Will the hour strike at last of fulfillment of my yearning?

But they say that the devil can't be trusted. He does nothing out of pure good will. So tell me plainly and frankly: What do you expect for your service?

Very little, sounded from the corner. Hardly worth talking about.

As long as you live no wish shall be denied you. Whatever your fancy may devise, your heart desire, you shall never turn to me in vain. Time and space, death and eternity, shall lie unveiled before you, clear as crystal, and every riddle's teasing knot unloosed. You shall perceive the reason of all being and the well considered plan of events. Before your eyes shall the last frontiers vanish by which your mind has hitherto been held in check. Even your least whim shall be my law, and should the moment ever come when I fail you with my answer, then shall the bond be severed that binds you to me.

But when, some day, that last hour arrives for you when your vital strength is spent and your spirit feels prepared for its long rest: what happens then lies in my hand. For that you are to ask no accounting.

There is a gentle creaking of the ancient timbers, and soft shadows float about the flickering lamp. In the weary soul heaven and hell circle round and round and contend for victory. Then in the old man's eyes a hard light shines, and his voice rings firm as he says:

So be it: I am ready to accept your bargain. To know! To understand! Even for a little while! To gaze deep into the whirlpool of events and glimpse the basis of all being, which I have striven so long to see. Scarcely can I comprehend it: the long desired hour has come which brings me release! But I have always thought that that Savior who died for so many could never be my deliverer.

Of what account to me are death and resurrection, hell, time, and eternity, so long as my mind yearns in vain for understanding and my soul gasps in the anguish of desire! Is not this unsatisfied impulse gnawing at my heart worse than the worst pains of hell? Then it will be better for me to take upon myself the certainty of torment through eternity than to lurk forever about closed doors, never getting to the bottom of the riddle.

Satan, I am ready! One glimpse into the heart of the infinite outweighs all the pains of hell!

From out the gloomy background of the apartment there strides forth into the circle lighted by the lamp a tall, slender fellow, a cock's feather in his hat, his body wrapped in a red mantle. The sharp features of his pale countenance seem as if carved with a chisel, and supercilious scorn plays about his thin lips.

Good, old fellow! Says he in a high-pitched voice. You please me. But I knew that you would some day come to me. You hardly fit in the other circle. A man who hides such depths within him is not made for God and his laws.

But now, up, and out from these narrow walls! Inside a moldering house the mind grows moldy too. If you want to grasp the deepest meaning of life you must traverse lands! you cannot keep your soul in fetters behind dusty windows and yellowed parchments. Out yonder laughs another world which will bring to your restless spirit the peace that it has longed for.

But before we leave this room, which has so often been for you a torture chamber, you must change your outer form. Age is the heaviest burden man has to bear. In an aged body the mind itself grows old. The truth that takes timid form in an old brain already bears decay within it; it is hardly born before it warns of worms and tombs.

Take this powder; dissolve it in water and bathe your head and limbs in it. You'll feel its effects quickly enough.

The old man does as he is bid, moistens his withered body with the elixir and can scarcely comprehend the miracle that has suddenly been wrought in him. The furrows that time has graven on his brow are erased by the power of the charm. Gone are the white beard, the white hair which a moment before had covered his head, and with them the slow decay which hourly warned him of his end.

A youth stands by the window, blond and strong. From his eyes glows youthful vigor. Youth flows like fire through his limbs, mysterious powers steel his every nerve. The whole world seems now so different to him; he feels the pulse of life beat in his veins. Titanic powers swell his breast. His fervent gaze drinks in all the splendor that lies about him; every sound that beats upon his ear thrills his heart like a maiden's kiss.

The first glimpse of dawn shows in the east as the two cross the worn threshold of the ancient house and the heavy door clangs shut behind them. With springing steps they hasten through the silent, dreaming streets of the city toward its ancient gates. Still drunk with sleep the aged warder opens for them a narrow door and lets them out into the open.

Now the city lies behind them, and they stride lustily up the little hill from whose summit one gets a glorious view across the land. The youth gazes down into the valley with intoxicated eyes, while his slender companion looks down, indifferent and bored.

Forest and field lie bright with the splendor of the new-risen sun. The lark soars, warbling, toward the sky, greeting, full-throated, the vast, beaming orb of day. From hedge and bush sounds happy twittering. Butterflies cradle on dew-covered blossoms, and from the neighboring wood resounds the cuckoo's luring call. In the vale the little stream goes babbling on its way, and yonder lies the ancient city, veiled in a softening haze: an enchanted world under the spell of slumber.

Nature has never seemed so lovely to him. He has never felt so strongly the unity of his being with all creatures. The heavy weight which through the years has lain on his soul has vanished, and his spirit floats in the blue ether like a boat on a placid lake.

Leisurely the two wanderers descend the other side of the hill into the valley and pace along beside the little brook, which, gently winding, pursues its way toward its distant goal, till their path leads them to a narrow bridge.

A girl in soft garments, with flowers twined in her golden hair, knowing a bare seventeen or eighteen autumns, stands loitering on the other shore; her deep eyes gaze guileless and innocent upon the two wanderers. The youth seizes greedily on the warming glance of those soulful eyes, and a feeling he has never known before lays gentle hold upon his throbbing heart.

Can this perhaps be love? He has never known before what love means. Love has always been for him a petty vice of weak-willed men who had no earnest purpose in life. Woman has seemed to him the epitome of sin and trivial pleasure, who drags man away from the path of duty and serious thought, wastes his powers, makes his existence aimless.

For this reason he has banished the other sex from his vicinity, so that no sinful desire should disturb his circles, cripple the pinions of his soul. No woman has ever crossed the threshold of that room in which he has spent the greater part of his previous life, alone with the clamorous thoughts which lurked in its every corner like timid messengers from unknown worlds. That was no place for idle pastime and relaxing lust.

But now as this maiden's glance burns into his heart a new feeling has come over him, that is in perfect harmony with the profound unity of his own being with everything about him. The impulse to tender confession, the longing for this unknown being, course wholesomely through all his limbs and shed a warm glow over his soul. His step lags. He casts a perplexed sidelong

glance at the tall figure beside him, who has all the while been regarding him with ill-concealed mockery.

The milkface has hit you hard, he drawls. A trim little creature, by my faith! Still fresh as dew and appealing to the appetite. Put no check on your feelings. Never neglect what the moment brings you! Forward, my noble youngster! Don't be bashful! She'll not be stubborn, this young thing. Meanwhile I'll just draw one side for a while; when you need me I'll be at your service.

The young man hastens resolutely to the other shore, embracing the maiden's dainty form with his caressing gaze. His flattering words fall alluringly on her ear. Then she drops her eyes in shame and a hot glow floods her face. Now they seat themselves on a moss-covered stone in the shadow of an old elm tree and talk together intimately, like friends who have known each other always. Then their hands are intertwined, and their lips are silenced in a kiss.

But as the young pair silently rise and, still in close embrace, move toward the neighboring wood, they are followed by the malicious gaze of the other, who stands with folded arms on the other shore, and speaks in scorn:

O man, you pitiful creature, compounded of spirit and clay! The spirit always wants to lift him up to heaven, but the clay weighs him down to earth, so that he always crawls and always hungers. An odd fellow is man! Always on the quest for the philosopher's stone, yet when he feels knowledge close beside him he commits the greatest folly of his life. His mind revels in the quest of heaven, in dreams of the stars, and he does not notice that he is lying in the gutter like a drunkard full of new wine.

He, yonder, sat for seventy years in his house and dreamed of building bridges to the infinite, consumed himself in self-engendered torment, and would actually have driven himself mad, because his God would not take the bandages from his eyes and let him see clearly to the bottom of all riddles. He carried world-encompassing thoughts in his brain and often fancied that he caught the rhythm of distant spheres. With feverish gaze he waited for the hour when the dark curtain that had thus far hidden from him the meaning and purpose of existence should at last be raised. And as it slowly dawned on him that all his efforts were bound by space and time, that the mind could never succeed in grasping the reason for things, his heart was utterly crushed and his soul cried out to me in unnamable torture.

But today the lout is already cured. Now that he has tasted blood his great longing will slowly fade. His soul that once so boldly tried to scale the loftiest heights will content itself with the Mount of Venus. Instead of seeking for what lies behind all things, he'll learn what lies behind a woman's lap. And this lore will make him far more happy than the airy structure of ideas which he has spent his life in building, and to which he has never yet been able to give definite form. So the unsatisfied yearning and last hopes will fade out before the insatiable fire of lust, and attainable

desire will blunt the urge for knowledge.

But he will never understand the nature of his folly. For even in little things his eyes are focused only on the remote and do not see what lies right before his nose. He boasts of his free will, believes himself the master of his fate, and is merely the marionette, dancing on threads pulled by obscure powers.

Now he is angry at his God because he has fooled him, kept him all these years in leading strings, and he does not dream that he has already gulped a new bait and is once more dangling on a hook. That he himself put out the bait, forged the new hook, like all the others he has bitten on, of course never enters his mind.

And yet this truth is so near to him. I and my brethren up yonder, what are we but creatures of his mysterious urge! His spirit created us, the sultry passion of faith begot us and flung us out into the realm of reality.

So the same game repeats itself forever and always ends in stalemate, since the cards are always equal. Whether God or Satan will in the end draw the higher trumps in this game is still an even chance and makes no difference in the outcome, for man will always be the stake.

The years fly by in the colorful game of time, and restlessly the two wanderers pursue their way across strange lands, over strange seas. Many a clever trick has the tall man performed. The dear public stretches its neck and arms whenever he sets his dark arts in play, crosses itself perhaps, and timidly gets out of his way.

He gets to know thoroughly the heights and depths of life, is at home with students, peasants, travelers; and even the splendor of the great is well known to him. At many a court he is a welcome guest, who charms the coin of God's anointed out of their coffers, beguiling them meanwhile with mummery and sleight of hand.

It really is no laughing matter for the tall man, for the whims of this fellow to whom his art has given a second youth are as countless as the sands of the sea. His head is filled with a thousand lusts and desires, and every wish becomes at once the father of a flood of other wishes. In this chaos of wavering ideas there is no resting place, no fixed point. Ideas whirl up and down in a mad chase, and are already dead before they are thought through to an end. It is a constant rise and fall of the emotions, a conflagration of restless passions, lacking all purpose, all direction.

What many years ago burned in his heart, the profound yearning for the reason of things, the burning urge for understanding, is long lost and buried. Only rarely in a silent hour does a soft voice remind him of times long gone. Then the old longing suddenly wells up, and shudderingly his spirit hears the rustle of distant worlds. But then the tall man quickly snatches him out of his dream with mummery and chatter. Quickly his mind is off on the new trail, and all his yearning vanishes painfully into the depths.

And so, unceasing, year piles on year, and for the second time old age softly announces itself. The hair bleaches, the eyes grow dim, and deep within yawns the great void.

Now the tall man leaves him more in peace, disturbs him less frequently in his meditations. A great loneliness seizes on his fluttering heart, and the path of life lies drear before his eyes.

Out yonder autumn drags wearily through the land, and the leaves fall, soundless, from the trees. Withered leaves whirl in the wind, the great death makes its way through field and grove. And in him, too, it is slowly turning autumn; only deep in his heart does there still glow a spark of that fire which once consumed him and drove him out of his native land to foreign soil.

As formerly, he sits today again at home and turns over in his brain thoughts that are dull and heavy. The autumn wind drives roughly through the night and shakes the ancient building as if in scorn. He sits at the window as he did so many years ago and wearily sweeps his glance through gloomy outer space. But today no distant star gleams for him out there, no moonbeam pierces the darkness. Black, like the abyss, yawns the sky above him. He feels as if walled in within the shaft of a well, and dark shadows rise out of the depths.

Now the game draws to its end, he murmurs. The tall, stealthy rogue, it seems, has slipped away. Just today, when he was to have rendered me an accounting, he has basely left me in the lurch. And yet what could he do for me in this hour? I can hardly endure his existence any longer. I have always been, in fact, alone, even when others joined me. Today it is doubly good to be alone, so that no mockery may disturb my last hours.

Now he is filled with the memory of quiet dreams. A soft note sounds from out the depths. Is it the gentle rhythm of distant worlds which he sometimes heard long, long ago, like the soft rustling of eternity?

A cool breeze fans his heated brow, and thoughts swarm swiftly up out of the depths. Clear as crystal seem to him the ideas that without effort shape themselves into words in his brain. Never has he seen so deeply into things.

Is this the final revelation? he asks timidly. The final revelation just before the end? It is as if scales fell from my eyes; the last illusion falls in fragments. Betrayed and sold a second time! And I felt myself so strong in my delusion!

They can fool a shepherd only once in his lifetime. But me, whom the world calls the great sage, they have tricked twice.

First it was God who kept me in leading strings, then Satan taught me behavior. And I, fool that I am, failed to recognize the contemptible game and felt myself the lord and master, when I was but the puppet of his will, the blind dupe of his imposture!

How great, how like a creator, I thought myself when with violent hand I tore the bond that had hitherto bound me to God! I would explore, spy out the core of things, bathe my spirit in the knowledge of all being. Thus have I sacrificed my soul's bliss, brought damnation through eternity on me, for a brief span of glimmering understanding.

Satan promised me that. And I, I, the fool, I trusted his word, moved at his beck like a simpleton, and never guessed that I was just the plaything of his whim. He

promised me understanding. But instead of unveiling for me the meaning of life, the beginning and the end of all things, he offered me woman as lure to spend the hours in trivial dalliance, fanning my senses to flame, drugging my mind to silence. He reminded my soul into petty coin and clipped the wings of my yearning before I guessed his purpose.

But now the kernel of the riddle is revealed to me: God and Satan are of the same race, the two poles about which our life revolves. No Satan without God, no God without Satan! As twins born in the selfsame hour they bear, forged on them, the same yoke, and it holds them together till the end of time.

Man's life is lived within this circle. We drift eternally from one pole to the other, but never escape from the circle which holds us in its magic spell. And if it dawns on us in some luminous hour that one of them is merely making a fool of us, we promptly turn to the other for help in our hour of need, for savior and redeemer.

And he is already waiting for us, hands us the same stuff printed with a new pattern so that we shall not recognize the old goods. God and the Devil is the name of this old firm. One partner cannot get on without the other; it would be all up with their business.

As long as our mind revolves in this circle it will never be illuminated by the light of understanding. For understanding—I feel this clearly—lies outside the circle of God and Satan; but thus far no road leads to it.

For me it is now too late; I feel that my hour has come. My tired limbs yearn for rest. But my race will not die with me. As long as man still dwells on earth his mind will strive for understanding: till his brood shall perish in the stream of time.

Now the future lies clear before my eyes. There is a sound like distant organ music in my ears. It is the hymn of the coming generations:

Liberation of man by himself! Salvation by his own strength!

Far, far in the East there glows another sun which has never shone upon this earth! But now it's time; the last hour draws nigh. Already I can see the dark edge of the desert.

* * *

The heaven is gray. The desert yawns. A mighty sphinx of smooth black marble lies outstretched upon the waste of fine brown sand, her gaze lost in dreary, infinite remoteness.

Nor hate nor love dwells in that gaze; her eyes are misted, as by some deep dream, and over her dumb lips' cold pride there hovers, gently smiling, just eternal silence.

The first wanderer gazes into the eyes of the sphinx, but he can never solve her riddle; wordless he sinks on the desert sands.

II The Second Road

THE road comes from Andalusia and has its beginning in the narrow streets of Seville, the city of love and adventure.

When the sun beats hot on the white walls, when no breath cools the leaves of the palms and heavy vapors rise from the earth, then Seville rests, relaxes her limbs, and waits for the cool breeze of evening.

But when the night comes down in silence, and a thousand stars shine from the river's depths, when the palm leaves rustle softly, and sweet fragrance floats from the gardens, then Seville wakes, sin strides soft-footed through the streets and wraps the entire city in her mantle.

From dark corners come the notes of mandolin and guitar and lover's serenade. A deep intoxication inflames the senses. The waves caress on the river's flood, flowers exchange kisses with the wooing wind, and fireflies betake themselves to a feast of love. The air is heavy with hot kisses. It seems as if the earth herself is trembling with fierce, passionate desire that wells, clamorous, from her every pore. High over the Alcázar's haughty walls shines bright the golden sickle of the crescent moon, emblem of grandeurs long, long gone. No God of Christendom has been strong enough to banish the ancient symbol from the sky. Though the brave Moslem horde fell in savage battle, crushed by the weight of the cross, the emblem of the prophet still shines from heaven, and its splendor is still mirrored in the rivers of Spain.

On this hot soil he was born. The passion of sin is in his blood, fills him with demoniac desire.

Black curls cluster about his proud head. Written on his countenance are rebellious defiance, tempestuous daring, which no law can hold in check, no sanctity can shake.

From his dark eyes glow the fire of hell, the bliss of heaven. But woe to the woman who falls under the spell of that glance; it sears her soul like a hot blast from the desert. The raging lust for sin leaps in her veins, her body is racked by fierce, feverish pangs, her every nerve cries out in passionate desire.

When, noiseless as a panther, he strides through the dusk, then is danger on the march, disaster on the prowl. Death hangs on his swordpoint, and it is terrible to rouse his wrath. When he appears, close behind him stalks dismal murder, the untamed passion of hell.

The dovelings in their nest are seized with a mysterious shudder, for no wall is too high, no bar too strong for him. The bars fall, the walls melt. No prayers, no tears help then. He does not stop halfway, and in his wake comes death and shame and the never ending torment of despair.

When he spends a night carousing with a circle of reckless toppers, when the wine stands blood-red in the cup, he quaffs with it heavenly joy and earthly bliss. For every drop that goes coursing through his veins serves but to unloose dark forces in him that are subject only to their own law.

When in the wine he feels the fiery flow of truth, he begins to argue:

But all truth is but intoxication of the senses, and all intoxication but a dream. In intoxication we break the heavy yoke of hypocrisy, the arbitrary bound that reason sets to check the bold play of the senses.

When one of those well-bred prigs, like a trained poodle, is born, he knows at once just how to tell good from evil. He drips dignity, decency, and good morals, and struts like a peacock in the ethical feathers with which he decks himself out on holidays. He weighs every word cautiously, veils the nakedness of experience with prudish hand, and carefully cherishes each ancient custom.

He finds a meaning and a purpose in everything, and stinks of honesty and gentility like a plague-infested rat. He sets standards even for sin, and when he sins does so always in moderation, so that he may not forget his role. It sickens me to look at one of that breed.

But if one of those stodgy Philistines happens to forget himself and intoxication befuddles his tiny bit of brain, he sweats petty lewdness at every pore. All the curl comes out of his virtue; he wallows in filth contentedly as a swine. The thin veneer of convention cracks, his hard-won breeding goes to the devil and leaves in its place just a heap of nonsense.

But no sooner is the vapor of the wine cleared from his head than all the wretchedness of his humanity returns to him. Petty remorse pounds at his petty heart. The Evil One has surely tripped him up. As if the devil would bother himself over such trash!

A pitiful tribe, not fitted for the sublime art of great sin. What they call sins are merely the petty lusts of hours of weakness, easily satisfied and quickly forgotten. And when a lout like that does enter on forbidden paths he seems to me like a eunuch stammering ineffective words of love. He makes even sin impotent. In truth he knows none too much of sin, and the Savior's sacrifice rests lightly on him. What is there to save in a worm like that! But great sin, such as lures me, sin that strides naked and undisguised through life, defying hell, despising heaven, the sin that bows to no god and proudly scorns the laws set by men, it merely feels itself dishonored by a wretch like that.

But even more than to the fierce delirium of wine is he given to the mad sport of love. Here is his realm, the arena of his deeds. No means is for him too base, no sacrilege too great. With cunning, subtlety and force he labors to dupe female hearts. The strongest fortress melts and falls before the flame of his hot lust.

But hardly has his hand plucked the fruit that once allured him when he throws it carelessly away. When once his lust is quenched the pleasure fades for him, and his soul is off in quest of new delights. It is only conquest that attracts him, not possession.

His ear is deaf to prayers, to rage, to tears. And when his Victim cries out in anguish, implores him to safeguard her honor, give her his hand as he has promised, and so wipe out the shame that

he has wrought on her, then jesting mockery flickers about his lips, and scornfully he dismisses her flood of tears:

Injured innocence, my child, lost honor? Let me tell you, that means little. The kingdom of my mind is as wide as the sea. How could I bind myself to *one*, while so many lips are still unkissed, so many blossoms not yet plucked! For one who knows how to prize the pleasure of the moment, the mad delights of a night of love, for him the price of honor is small.

Was I created for the bond of matrimony? A bond for traders and Philistines who were born with antlers already on their brows! They are content that their petty passion should be ruled by sacred law, should bear the stamp of a higher will than theirs.

A marriage bed! I shudder! It is the grave of love, the grave of sin! For love without sin is an insipid drink. For the honest burger it becomes an altar where he decently burns incense, deliberately increases his breed.

What wonder there are so many simpletons in the world! For one begotten in a bed like that carries none too heavy a weight in his head, and has blood that crawls but sluggishly through his veins. If it were not that by tricky chance a hawk once in a while gets into the henroost to lighten the good husband's task, the little pretense at a brain that this breed owns would long since have melted into slop. But adultery saves the race, and brings forth now and then a useful generation.

You can't grasp it, my child? You my your eyes out and keep dreaming of an early grave? Well, now, that really would not be the worst thing that could happen. For if one finds life too much for him he'd better see what death has to offer. It's wrong to load on a man a burden that he can scarcely drag along. So, if one has drawn a blank in life, death's sure to be a winning number.

If you're too weak to endure the fierce joys of sin, then take yourself to other fields! The stream, the silken cord, a sip of poison are prompt deliverers from the troubles of the moment and open the way from this vale of tears to the bright world you dream about.

No one should ever lift a human being who has stumbled. If one cannot stand on his own feet, let him fall! For pity is the worst of all the vices that man has invented! It dishonors the emotions, destroys the mind, and makes of men pariahs from life. Pity is rape with a mask on, a painted virtue that struts about the open market like a whore, extols the vilest selfishness to the skies, and is always secretly counting the profit that honest dealing brings the merchant.

It does not really help the weak; it merely shoves him deeper into the mire. But for those who by cunning lay hold on wealth and honor pity provides a soothing salve for their petty consciences. The thief tosses a few stolen pennies into the outstretched palm of a beggar and so smooths his way to heaven.

When once they spoke to him of that old man who sought for the reason of everything, who wished to see the depths of the flood of time, and burnt himself out in the driving urge to trace the ultimate truth, he laughed in scorn:

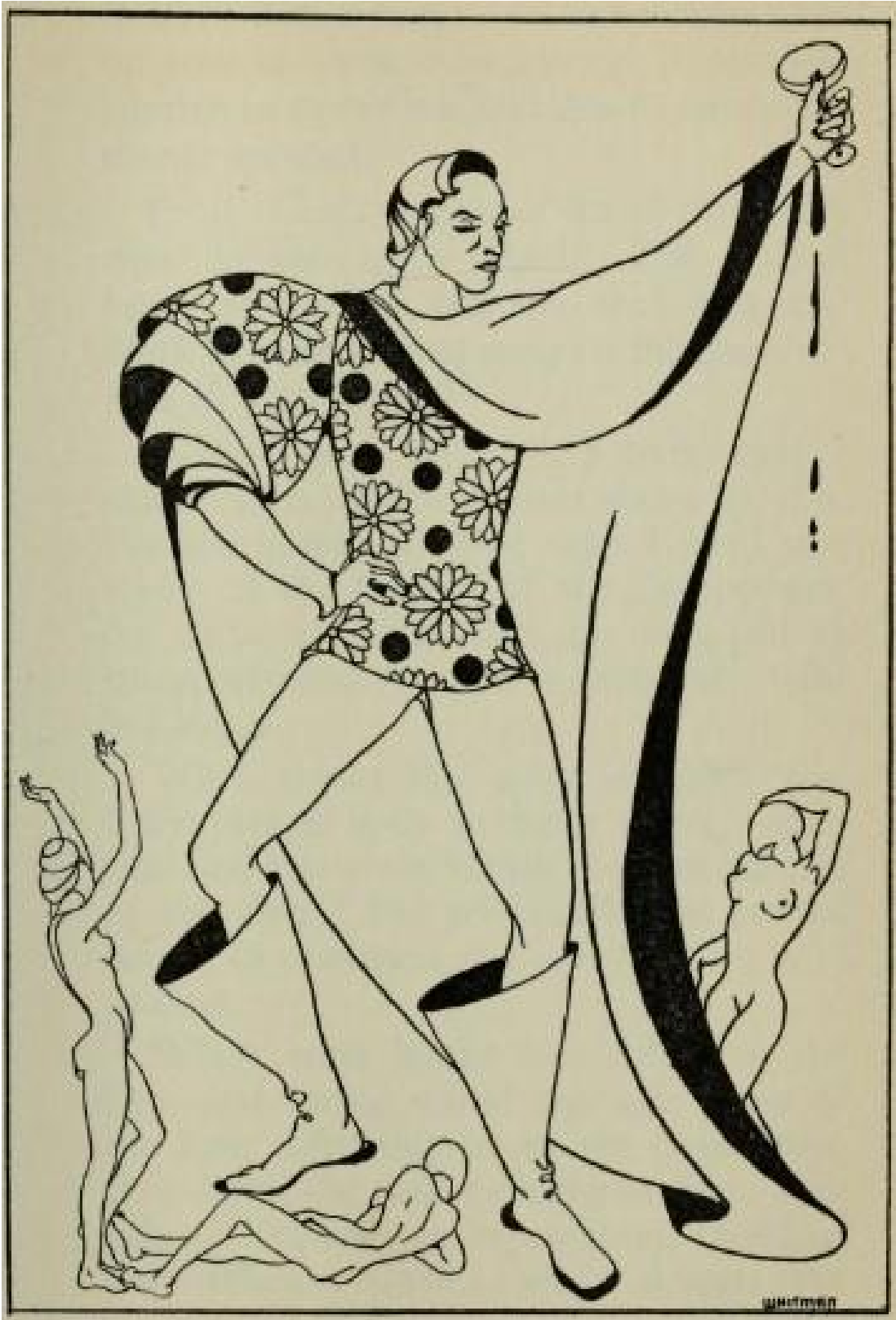
You old fool! What is the meaning of life, the beginning and end of all things to you? Life in itself has neither end nor purpose. It is man who thinks meaning and purpose into life. Past and future are chimeras: the first a fallen fruit, the second an unwritten book for which no title has been thought up.

What does it matter to me What has been or what is to come? What is left along the way over which we hurry is lifeless, dead and buried. What awaits us is not yet born. It does no good to burrow in the dust of tombs, even less to chase after soapbubbles in which the riches of the future glisten enticingly. Both take us into the land of ghosts and shadows.

Vanished glory is but rubbish, fit food for moths and worms. If you yearn for such a diet your mind grows moldy, and spiders spin their webs in your brain and trap your thoughts in their subtle net.

The fleeting moment is for me the truest friend; my kingdom is today. World history begins on the day when I first saw the light; it ends when I quench the last spark of my being in the womb of time.

Life is not here for one to comment on, brood over, and search through for a meaning which does not exist. Life should be for us a full cup from which to drink deep drafts with delirious desire. And when the cup is drained, the play of sense at end, then let's not whimper like spoiled children. Shatter the empty beaker on a stone!



You ask: Whence come we? Whither are we going? But while you wreck your mind, rack your soul, to find a meaning for the jugglery Of the senses, the hour has fled unutilized, unfathomed. For out of nothing have we proceeded, and into the vast nothing shall we vanish again; therefore take care that your brief span of life shall not be spent in nothing!

Your eyes follow the stars that whirl through space, and your lips ask dumbly:

Why? The soft note of the spheres falls on your ear; you want at once to fix their rhythm in dry words and lament when you do not succeed.

Fool! Can't you hear the rhythm that roars in your own blood? The exalted hymn of passion and sin, that ebbs and flows like the sea and rouses a thousand desires in your breast?

When I gaze into a girl's warm eyes, I can see stars that have never shone for you. For the glitter of those stars I yield you freely all the galaxies of the astronomers, for these are stars that are wrapped in transports and tremble mysteriously with hot lust.

When errant lips unite in kisses, and body presses body in fierce desire; when time and the world vanish over the horizon of sin, then I feel profoundly the eternal reason of existence, the revelation of wild passion.

When wine blinks like rubies in the cup, and luring sound the soft notes of the lute, inflaming me to yet new kisses, then I feel the final meaning of life. It is silly to live only in expectation, brooding over obscure riddles, while flowers are blooming by the wayside and with caressing nods speak of fulfillment.

And so the storm-lashed years slip past him. His path lies behind him like the red northern lights, strewn with the dying, who howl their curses through the woe-filled air. And graves show round on the fallow soil to tell where he has been.

Who can count the wounds his sword has dealt, bathed so oft in foeman's blood, the women's hearts that molder, broken, on the way where he has passed? The wail of ruined lives follows his footsteps, and the sighs of the dying, solemn as funeral bells. Many a dead fist is clenched against him, and pale lips accuse him in fierce pain.

But he never gives a glance backward to look upon the past. He thinks:

What lies behind is gone, perished, swallowed by all-devouring time, and has no further charm for sensuous desire. What's dead is dead; eternity cannot give new bloom to what once has been.

And so the breath of death robs him who burrows about in ancient tombs of the power of action. For out of crumbling walls there rises only a pale band of ghosts. Remorse coils, snake-like, there to creep like a thief into heart and brain. And for him whom once this plague has smitten the grace of the present moment is forever dead.

Then let the dead wait on the dead. Who fixes his gaze on what has been, himself has been, a shadow painfully feeding on the fleshless figures of the abstract. His mind is like a mausoleum, hiding pale specters under marble.

Out of those vaults there rises longing for understanding, anxious inquiry for the reason of things. There dwells the spirit that sits enthroned on a grave and burrows like a body-snatcher in dead ashes until, completely enveloped in the fumes of decay, he no longer perceives the colorful play of the hour.

Very different is the lot he has chosen for himself. His pleasures never fall of themselves into his lap. What he enjoys with fierce sensuous lust must be conquered, must be wrung from life. The insipid gifts of chance have no charm for him; what he can seize without effort he values lightly. Only what he must win by battle, in the midst of danger and death, pleases him. He feels at his best when life and death revolve around his swordpoint; on paths where the foot loses its hold, the jaws of the pit gape for him.

Fate's lightnings flash around his head; his whole being is engulfed in storm. He sins on principle and desecrates because he likes to. When he strides like a demon on the brink of shuddery depths, or with sure foot scales precipitous heights, he feels a fierce joy in his strength and bids defiance to the powers of Fate. The blood dances wildly in his veins, and his soul flows in streams of fire, like lava gushing out of mysterious depths.

Proud as an eagle he soars aloft, drinking in freedom in full drafts. Only when he fights every day for life does he feel lord and master of his wish, boldly pursuing his course.

Now his glance falls upon a grandee's daughter, a woman than whom he has never seen one lovelier. The image of innocence beams from her eyes, and about the splendor of her proud body floats a dainty fragrance of chastity that strikes impious desire dumb.

But rarely does she set foot in worldly circles. She lives in a quiet sphere of her own, under her father's watchful eye, so that no alien influence may disturb her.

Here is a sport that will be worth while. To hunt down game like this is his heart's delight. That she is already pledged to another does but make the undertaking more alluring, heightening the wild intoxication of the sin. Not only does the mad lure of love beckon to him here, danger and ruin threaten also, defeat and death—just what he needs to spur his lust.

By deceit and cunning he finds a way into that quiet spot where she toys with flowers, dallies with birds, and follows with dreamy eyes the butterfly that flutters from flower to flower.

There stands the frightful being before her eyes, turning her young heart to ice. She stands as if rooted to the spot. A slight shudder runs through her slender body; then, in silence, she lifts her eyes to see who has dared to force his way into her world. The glow of anger kindles in her cheek, and her hand goes up in threatening command.

Then, at one glance from the strange man's eyes her proud arm falls powerless to her side. From those eyes glow the fires of hell, the boundless bliss of heaven. She feels the earth rock beneath her feet. A nameless horror grips her heart, her blood beats fiercely in her temples. Half dreaming she listens to words from far away which play caressingly on her young senses and speak of the delights of love.

In desperation she strives to collect her strength. Her father's blood flows in her veins; the honor of a grandee surges swiftly up to quell the impetuous impulse of her senses. Hark! Is that not her father's voice now ringing in her ears?

And then she feels again that frightful glance, that strikes into her soul like a bolt of lightning. Hot lips are pressed against her lips, a soft farewell sounds in her ear, and like a shadow the figure vanishes.

For a long time she stands as if spellbound, then she feels her strength slowly fail her, and she sinks, moaning, on the marble bench. As from a distant world the gentle plashing of the fountain comes to her to still the wild beating of her heart.

Then once more she hears her father's voice. Men's footsteps sound along the path, and loud voices fall on her sensitive ear. Here comes her father, arm in arm with the man whom his will has chosen for her spouse. A chill strikes to her heart and wrings a dull moan from her breast, while her soul writhes in silent anguish.

Has the world gone suddenly mad, the meaning of things turned round? This man to whom her lips have sworn fidelity seems suddenly so strange. And again she feels that hot glance which glows like a firebrand in her bosom, and unknown portals stand open of which her simple heart has never dreamed.

Gently the old man takes her soft hand in his and speaks in playful jest:

Dreaming, my child? Well, this is the right time for dreams — the dreams of youth still burdened by no weight of duty.

There is a profound meaning in God's setting of age beside youth. If youth soars boldly in the realm of dreams, then age must see to it that the dreams come true.

And that's just what I have done, my child. Before the autumn comes again you will be leaning on your husband's arm.

Your dream will have been fulfilled.

Her father's words fall like a dirge upon her ear. Her heart throbs in torment, but her lips dutifully thank her father, who gleefully bestows his blessing on the youthful pair.

The wedding day has dawned. The golden disk of the sun gleams from a cloudless sky, and bells peal gladsome welcome to the feast of joy. A crowd of guests throngs the count's palace, speeding the time in cheerful sport.

The organ peals from the chapel, and the priest's words solemnly unite the noble pair. But as the lovely bride's white hand is placed in the strong hand of her spouse and a yes that can scarce be heard struggles to her lips, she feels again that Satanic gaze that floods her soul with fire. Like a sudden flash of lightning the gaze envelops her for a moment, to vanish at once into profound darkness.

Her slender body trembles in silent horror; her brow feels cold, as with the death-sweat. She feels the curse of Fate upon her head and steals confused glances at her husband, whose eyes are blurred by the transport of his happiness.

She struggles with all the strength of pride to shake off the spell that enwraps her heart. The blood of grandees flows in her veins, and this helps her to fight against the sinister power that has so wantonly thrust itself into the circle of her life.

Then a great calm steals over her, but a coldness of the grave within her heart warns that it is the calm before the storm.

On her husband's arm she proudly enters the great salon. The paleness of her countenance does but enhance her charm, and all eyes hang speechless on the picture. Then a mighty shout of jubilation fills the hall, and a hundred goblets are lifted to pledge her health and joy.

With gentle grace she bends her head in greeting to the joy-filled throng of guests. Now joy is unconfined. The lofty hall resounds with sounds of happiness; wine sparkles in splendid beakers, and cheerful voices fill the air. A mild intoxication lays hold on heart and head; the youthful pair lose themselves in the delightful tumult, and every heart is filled with bliss. Desire unconfessed shines from glowing eyes; the whole world seems born anew; each guest feels coursing through his veins the swift blood of youth.

Thus hour after hour takes its happy flight, and outside night has long since spread her pinions. The hour arrives when the noble pair make ready to take their silent departure. The husband's eager eyes embrace his young bride's lovely form, and he whispers to her tender words of love.

A soft blush reddens her pale cheeks, she tries to avoid her bridegroom's gaze. Then a sudden pang shoots through her soul, and, as if drawn by some sinister, compelling word, her gaze turns toward the middle of the hall.

Leaning with folded arms against a marble column, as if himself carved of stone, she beholds the stranger who had dared intrude into her sanctuary. His eyes, fixed on her, glow with an ominous fire. His gaze seems to cast a spell on her; the gates of hell open before her, and tongues of flame leap at her from the depths. The red glow burns her eyes; it seems as if her heart must burst; her trembling hand is crushed against her breast.

Her stern pride has been abruptly blown away, melted before the ardor of his gaze, that draws the blood out of her heart, fetters her soul in thousand-linked chains.

And then she feels her petrification melt, a wild desire fires all her senses. She feels a mad impulse to shout: It is not this man beside me whom I married! No, he yonder, who strips bare my soul—he it is, for whom my heart throbs!

No longer does she strive to fight against her destiny. She knows her fate stands yonder, a messenger of doom from Satan's realm, who is luring her soul out with his daring lust. She feels the blood surge back into her heart, her breath stop, her strength fade. Quicker! Quicker! Why does he wait so long? She can bear this deadly pain no longer!

As if the stranger had sensed her anguish, he suddenly leaves his place and strides assuredly toward her. He sweeps the bride-groom with a contemptuous glance, then, in a low tone, asks to speak with him. The bridegroom stares at him uncomprehending, but, impelled by some inner force, follows him to the center of the room. There he hears words that make his blood boil. His heart throbs fiercely, but he tames his pride and merely waves the bold blasphemer in silence

toward the door. But the latter looks at him with unspeakable scorn and flings in his face an insulting word. Then swords flash in the air and there resounds the clash of steel on steel. A deathly silence fills the vast hall, as if horror had frozen every heart. All eyes follow the grim game in which life struggles against death.

A cry of agony bursts from torture-torn lips. Pierced through the heart the bride-groom sinks to the floor, and the stranger stares with gloating eyes upon the foe whom he has struck down in the fullness of his youthful strength. Then he walks calmly through the silent hall and strides through the wide portal into the night.

Pale as a marble image sits the noble lady, staring with lifeless eyes upon the silent man, whose heart's blood gushes out in libation to his wedding day. Before her gaze yawns the depth of the pit; she feels the unknown touch of death, feels her young heart congeal to ice.

Only slowly does the cold spell of horror that has quenched all life within the hall dissolve. Shrieks and moans are heard, a wild turmoil of voices; and what pale fear had at first repressed now pours out all the louder.

The aged father, who, withdrawing from the guests, had retired from the hall, to wait for his child in a quiet recess and press her to his heart once more before she leaves him, re-enters. The outcry of the guests has called him forth. He sees his daughter's horror-stricken gaze, the dead man lying there on the floor, staring empty-eyed at the ceiling, and from the disconnected words of those about him gathers what has happened.

Then the old man rushes out into the night to overtake the desecrator who has cast dishonor on his house, cruelly shattered his happiness to ruins. A few friends from the throng follow him, and the wild chase through the narrow streets is on.

In a silent square, lit faintly by the moon, they glimpse the dark form of the stranger.

Halt, coward! calls the old man in a thunderous voice. Draw your sword, so that I may avenge the shame that you have done my house!

A coward—I? Old man, you are out of your senses, mocks the other. It would be better for you to practice calm. Your arm is no longer strong enough to enforce atonement. It's unbecoming at your age to strut like a barnyard cock.

The old man's sword leaps from its scabbard. Now the mocker too, must draw. The blades clash sharply in the moonlight, and blue sparks fly from the hot steel. The old man knows how to wield a sword; not even the meanest envy can deny him that. But about the stranger's blade plays death itself, and he is invincible as hell.

A dull thud, his blade falls from the old man's hand. And while his friends bend anxiously over him, the despoiler vanishes swiftly into the night.

The months fly by. They rarely speak of the wedding feast of death. In the churchyard of Seville there is a new monument bearing the marble image of the count. He stands there, pale, hand on his swordhilt, eyes raised toward heaven. From on high the moon's rays shine down and flicker softly over ancient graves. The count's likeness gleams, spectral, in their light, and the stern folds about his mouth seem sterner still. He stands there like a symbol of vengeance, an ambassador from the dumb realm of ghosts.

Then soft steps sound on the path. Out of the dim shadow the stranger steps briskly and gazes with grim scorn upon the image of his victim.

How goes it now, old chap? he scoffs insolently. Does one get bored in the realm of ghosts? Is there no wine there, no mouth to kiss: does no lute sound for the carousing throng?

I'm sorry for you, but it was not my fault. Your frenzy forced me to the fight. But what is done cannot be changed, and it would be useless to dig up things again. But just to let you know that I bear you no ill will I invite you to a banquet at my home tomorrow night. A well-set table, the best wines, and lovely lips to kiss. What heart can ask more! That should be enough to move a marble statue. You'll come? You accept my invitation?

A quiver runs through the cold stone, and on the white forehead shines a threatening glow. The white lips move gently, and as if from the depths of the tomb there falls on the scoffer's ear: I shall come. Be prepared!

He stands bewildered, rubs his eyes.

What was that? Did someone speak to me? Is wine making a fool of me? Are my senses tricking me? It seemed as if the dead man accepted my invitation.

That would be a joke! A guest of marble at a feast! All right, I'll be prepared to receive him!

The room is bright with the light of candles, the sweet tones of lutes fall enticing on the ear. The table is spread, but the guests are still lacking. For outside a wild storm is raging. From the black heavens the lightning darts a thousand bolts, and crashing thunder roars incessant through the room. It is as if the elements were in conspiracy. The air is sultry as if charged with fire. One feels the flames about one's heart and mind.

The stranger presses his forehead against the panes, illumined by the lightning's glare, and feasts on the mad play of nature. To him it seems a Bacchanal of sin, this savage sport of the wild elements, and his heartbeat quickens in his breast.

Thus hour after hour vanishes, and ever fiercer grows the fury of the storm. Midnight is close at hand, but still the hall is empty. No guest comes to enjoy the festive display.

At last he seats himself at the empty table and signals to a servant to bring the food:

Wasted effort! No guest will cross my threshold in a storm like this. But what can't be today will be tomorrow. So for this feast I'll just be my own guest. Your health, my friend! Your very good health! To Sin and Freedom, this first glass!

Just as he proudly sets the beaker to his lips the church bells peal the hour of twelve. Then heavy footsteps are heard through the tumult of the storm, and the great entrance gate springs open with a shriek of its hinges. And now the steps come threateningly along the path and a heavy hand knocks at the door.

The servant stands, turned to stone beside the table, gazing in silent horror toward the portal. The master must bestir himself to admit this tardy comer to his banquet. With steady hand he throws the door open; on the threshold stands the statue of the count.

You invited me, says a voice fit for the grave. Well I am here. Do you shudder at my visit? Does remorse seize on your false heart? The dead never break their word.

You are welcome, noble sir! It is a very signal honor for me to receive you in my house! Be seated! But be careful, my chairs were not designed for guests like you. May I be your cupbearer? This is good wine. You've never tasted better!

I am not here to carouse with you. The voice again seems from the tomb. He who has entered the realm of shadows feels no more desire for food or drink. I have come to end your impiety, an avenger of the God whom you have so insolently scorned.

Do you see the wild uproar of nature, the lightnings of heaven that play about your house? Do you hear the roll of thunder above us? It is the wrath of the Creator, who demands an accounting for the countless crimes with which in savage ruthlessness you have burdened your soul.

Every gust of wind carries the curses of your victims, the death rattle of those on whom you have trampled. Love betrayed proclaims your guilt, broken hearts accuse you before the bar of God. Your hours are numbered. Use, then, the fleeting seconds to save your wretched soul. Repent, transgressor! Confess your guilt! Let remorse o'erflow your breast, so that you may find mercy in death!

Not badly spoken for a marble image, came the shameless answer. It seems they know the value of rhetoric in the realm of shades. But you have brought yours to the wrong place. I am not appalled by my deeds, and I am prepared to pay the full price of every rich, sinful joy. And so I laugh at any retribution in the future and I scorn the curses heaped upon me!

Ha! What if it be true that a judge waits for me sometime to demand accounting for my acts! I shall look him fearlessly in the eye and mock at his omnipotent wrath! If he is the great creator of all that is, then sin is a thing of his creation. And if my acts are not pleasing to the Creator, then all creation is just a bungler's whim! One knows a master by his work.

When, once upon a time, God made man out of the dust of the ground, then he breathed the breath of life into the lifeless clay and took no thought that life is spirit and spirit is mind, a law unto itself. His creative word commands the lump of clay, but never the spirit that he engendered. The body he can mow down with the sickle of death, but the spirit lives on even in the grave and leaves its heritage to coming generations.

It is *my* spirit that kicks against the pricks. He can crush me in blind fury, but he can never tame my spirit. He can destroy, but not subdue! The spirit creates its own world and scorns divine powers. On the very brink of the grave it sets up the banner of revolt.

Cease, insolence! the dead guest interrupts. I now see clearly that not hell itself could silence your defiance. God could crush you like a worm, but the poison of your scorn would splash to heaven from the utmost depths of hell. But the day of judgment will sometime come for you. When the vital strength dries slowly out of you, and mind and body weaken with the weight of years, then your impious mood will quietly desert you. The life that burns so fierce in you today will one day be the avenger of your deeds.

That's a long while yet, mocks the other. Before the snows of age have whitened my hair a blade will have pierced my heart. Still not even the years could crush my defiance.

No, you will live, the pale guest says. No sword will shorten your career on earth: Fate will be a buckler for your breast. Live, then, until your time shall be fulfilled and your hour of bitterness shall come!

With heavy step the grim guest leaves the house. The storm howls wild, many a tall tree is shattered, but the marble image strides unfeeling onward through the horror and the night, the lightning playing spectrally about it, till its steps die out in the distance.

Year follows year down the corridor of time. The glory of the spring follows on gray winter; cool autumn damps the summer's heat.

Like a storm cloud from which lightnings flame, the wanderer moves boldly along the pathway of his destiny. It almost seems as if the years put steel into his will, enflamed his senses to fiercer glow. Like a demon he hovers over the depths of the abyss, but no dizziness causes him to falter. He rushes in mad passion from indulgence to indulgence, boldly holding aloft sin's storm-lashed banner, while death and hell follow in his steps.

Now he has once more tricked a woman's heart, and in the silence of the night is on his way toward his loved one's well-guarded bower. In the garden a nightingale trills her song, and heavy odors drift through the window. The mild summer night is intoxicating, laden with the feverish glow of hot kisses. The woman's bosom is fiercely pressed against his breast, and she moans as she drinks in his fiery kisses. O night of love, filled with secret sin and wild desire, ah, that you might never end!

The hours speed by in swift intoxication, already the east is graying with the pale light of day. He rises from the downy pillow, embraces in a mournful glance the lovely woman who lies there wrapt deep in dreams.

Sleep softly, says he in playful mockery. Your hour of waking will be hard. And so it's better that I should take my leave while sleep still binds your eyes. It is always the same old song, the biting words of deep remorse, the hot flood of bitter tears, shameful tears.

But as he now turns quickly toward the window, the mirror shows him his full image. Smiling in satisfaction, he raises his beret; and then a sudden shudder shakes his body, for in the dark splendor of his curly locks he glimpses the first strand of white.

A white hair, the harbinger of approaching age. It sinks like a gloomy shadow into his soul. He is aware of the soft wingbeats of time: but swiftly he tears away from the image and safely and lightly swings himself from the balcony.

But the thought will not leave him now. It bores deep into his mind and lurks, silent, in the abyss of feeling. It sits like a specter in his brain, and if for an instant the memory slips away, knocks softly on the thin wall to bring it back.

In vain he tries to lay the ghost.

Fool, he tells himself, why worry about things that still lie hidden deep in time? The present is what you call your kingdom, the fortune of the hour is your star of destiny.

The sound of the lute still lures, and wine, and love. If you would taste the spring, then think not on the autumn! Each instant lasts a thousand years! He is a coward who does not seize the hour!

But the memory will not leave him. While he sits carousing with a gay crowd, he will suddenly remember that white hair. He sees the snows of age upon his head, the watery glance of bleary eyes—and the wine in his cup turns to gall.

When in hot desire he embraces the soft body of a woman and kisses her moist lips the thought darts in fierce passion swiftly through his brain and quenches his desire.

Does the harp call him to the joyous dance the recollection steals into his heart, and the music turns to dirges in his ear.

A funeral march, he tells himself, guiding a dead man to his tomb. This seems to me my funeral train: I'm following my own coffin—

So be it! The great autumn nears. Age may perhaps turn transports into gall, but no autumn shall tame my defiance.

And so he steadily pursues his path of destiny through distant lands, over distant seas, till he sees the last frontier there before him—

* * *

The heaven is gray. The desert yawns.

A mighty sphinx of smooth black marble lies outstretched upon the waste of fine brown sand, her gaze lost in dreary infinite remoteness.

Nor hate nor love dwells in that gaze; her eyes are misted as by some deep dream, and over her dumb lips' cold pride there hovers, gently smiling, just eternal silence.

The second wanderer gazes into the eyes of the sphinx, but he can never solve her riddle; wordless he sinks on the desert sands.

III The Third Road

THE cold frost of the north has its grip upon the earth. Fog glides ghostlike in from the sea across the land. The night is heavy with anticipations. The ancient castle seems wrapped in veil on veil, as if the Norns had spun their threads about it; its walls are brooding over a great crime.

No starlight pierces the cold depths of space to waken in the breasts of men tender yearnings and fabulous, unworldly dreams.

Fate strides, bronze-shod, on her way, cold, inexorable as is grim death itself, when it goes shuffling through the dreary lanes taking stock of its coming harvest.

Horror slips, soft-footed, about the castle and knocks lightly at secret portals. And its knock re-echoes in the hearts of men, calling up pale troops of ghosts.

And cold hands are gripping at the heart of the king, who groans in torment as he writhes in his sleep. But he cannot escape the visions which rise, hideous, before his eyes, stare vacantly into his face and pluck dumbly with their fingers for his heart.

A dull rattle issues from the pale lips, which tremble with terror in their sleep as if they felt the hot kiss of madness.

Specters glide through the dusk-filled room. They titter mockingly from hidden corners and roll stones on the sleeper's heart. A shudder, as of death, goes through him, his limbs are bathed in sweat, and with a shrill cry he wakes.

The woman by his side starts up in quick alarm. Her wandering gaze searches the darkness, which seems to tremble like an anxious human heart. Her slender body is shaken by a chill. In her mind she sees pale hands stretching tensely, grasping at her heart, and her hair stands up in horror.

Then the terror fades. and the two sink back powerless on their pillows and stare, speechless, into the dark as if listening to the whirl of the loom on which the Fates are spinning their thread of destiny.

It was in this castle that he was born, son of a king, a prince of the blood royal. A pale prince—his forehead seems almost bloodless. But behind that brow range thoughts deep as the pit and puzzling as riddles, moving in moody circles through his brain.

He casts shy glances from dark eyes, questioning men and worlds and things, as if he would spy out the deepest reason of existence.

When he learned of his father's sudden death, he has returned from distant lands, and he finds his homeland strange and empty, no longer able to arouse that quiet joy that binds men to the native soil with the tender glamor of remembrance.

He finds his mother betrothed to the man who now sways the scepter over the northland's provinces. That is for him a thunderstroke. He cannot comprehend the swift transformation, cannot understand how in a few short months a marriage feast can follow on a funeral.

The utter wretchedness of life lays hold on him. Any possible purpose in existence seems to him cheap and trivial, senseless as the mad freaks of chance. He sees the petty cares and woes of men, the pose with which they seek to cover their weakness of heart, and he scorns their petty masquerades.

This world seems to him a huge village fair, filled with many-colored tinsel stuffs and silly show, that charms only for the fleeting second and, scarcely set up, is gone again.

And so he carefully avoids the broad high, way and travels paths on which no others tread to track down the ideas that spring up in his mind in silent hours.

Like strange wanderers on foreign soil the swarming thoughts roam through his brain, leading him to the trail of many a riddle.

Out of dark, abysmal depths shyly and timidly ideas take form that can scarcely bear the light of day and are glimpsed as dim, strange things beyond vast chasms.

The others mark the prince's nature and whisper to one another that probably there is something wrong with him. An eccentric, who follows his own crotchets, has no sense of the plain course of things, and lets himself be guided by his whims.

His mother always feels uncomfortable in his presence, and when his glance searches her soul, the dull pangs of remorse gnaw at her heart.

But to the king the prince's behavior seems suspicious; the arrow of mistrust bores deep into his breast. Does that one guess what he hides deep within him? The awful guilt which he has taken on him and which no one knows but the grim band of demons that dance at night through his hideous dreams and trickle horror on his soul?

One night, long after the whole castle is asleep, something takes the prince out upon the ancient walls that rise, dark and silent, toward the sky. Profound silence fills all space, unbroken by the slightest sound. It is as if every breath had stopped and all life were suddenly stricken dead. Then a pale figure rises before him, and out of the fog there steps the image of his father.

Have no fear, my son! — The tones are dull and heavy. From the other World I come to you to reveal a crime most foul. I did not die as others die I was struck down by a murderous hand. 'Twas my own brother who struck the blow, who raised his hand against my life, who shed, like Cain, his brother's blood.

No, worse, far worse, for he had not been blinded by sudden wrath because he thought his Creator despised him. No, he came creeping on his belly like a snake to sting me to death in my sleep. It was the man who now wears my crown and claims your mother as his wife who basely slew me.

In your veins runs your father's blood. Of my seed you were conceived. And so into your hand I lay my vengeance. Your father's voice calls on you to act, so that he may find peace in the realm of shades.

The ghostly figure melts into the mist. The prince stood rooted where he was, as if he could not grasp the horror he has heard. But there is no room for doubt. It was his father's form, his father's voice. The blood within him turns to gall, and from the depths there comes a cry for vengeance.

He sees the murderer creep upon his victim, peacefully stretched out for rest and wrapped in profound slumber; sees him drop the subtle poison in his ear, secure that no misgivings shall rouse the doubts of men.

The deed was too ruthless, too outrageous, to be left unatoned. A murder more treacherous than the world has ever known before! His father dead, struck by a murderous hand! His own mother in that murderer's arms! It is a crime that cries to heaven! Vengeance becomes a sacred law, compensatory justice here on earth.

A cold horror seizes on the prince; he feels madness seething in his blood; all ties are torn asunder that have bound him to men and to mankind. Too gruesome is the hideous truth; for he has seen what mortal ne'er beheld before.

Rest in peace, pale shadow, he says softly. No longer shall you wander, restless, throughout the world; your son will help you to the peace that you have earned. I will execute your vengeance, and claim atonement for a crime too awful to be named.

The prince's hand grasps at his swordhilt, but his arm trembles, his strength fails, and dejectedly he lets his hand fall again. Too unexpected was his father's word, and the knowledge he has gained cripples his powers. But postponed is not abandoned. What today cannot complete zeal will perform some other day.

Vain effort! Though every day he sees the murderer's breast before his eyes, as if Fate were offering it for his stroke, each time his courage fails him at the last moment; he hesitates and considers, never reaches a resolution. 'Tis true he assails him often with harsh words, but never with cold steel.

Thus day after day vanishes, but he never comes to the deed. His father's wish lies heavy on his soul; often his hand moves with hurried grasp toward his sword, but the hour of decision never strikes, the hour that steels his will, calls forth his blade.

It is as if his knowledge cast a spell upon his strength. He has learned what none other has even guessed. But the knowledge strips him of the courage to act, corrodes the will that cries for deeds.

In vain his father's blood beats in his veins. He broods, he cannot understand himself, charges himself with cowardice, calls himself wretch, but no reproaches can lend strength to his enfeebled arm.

Then he seeks comfort in the realm of thought, substituting for the deed the dry results of logic, to still that inner voice chiding him for hesitation and delay. His mind burrows in unknown depths after the fashion of those sages and philosophers who interpret life according to their needs. But while the mind is ranging in profundity the hand has no time for hasty action.

What is the purpose of life? he asks himself. To me the solution does not seem too difficult. The purpose of life is merely death, for everything which comes to being in this world is blown away like dust by the breath of time; we practice but to learn to die. But purpose and meaning are of the selfsame stock, and if life has no other purpose, then in this purpose its meaning is given too.

To man life seems the highest good, but it would be better if he had never seen it. All that we perceive in the course of events vanishes once more like a breath in a hurricane.

Just as in the desert a track is soon blown away, so does time erase the traces of our being as if our feet had never touched the earth.

But what in the large attains its end is of no profit in the small. Even if death is fulfillment of life's purpose, dying will never comfort man. For what serves a purpose on the whole has in particular neither purpose nor meaning. And so life is for us just vain appearance. We are swept along in the vortex, and whirl like dry leaves in the wind until we fall at last to earth and become earth ourselves again.

If then life has neither meaning nor purpose, it has for us the value of an empty shell. This seems to me truth incontestable; the logic of it is beyond dispute. But if life has no value for us, then death is man's best friend, putting an end to the silly farce.

Yes, if immortality were ours, if we were freed from the bonds of time, then we could see the worth of life. For where immortality is found, there is the great audit of all being, call we it sin or call it virtue.

All meaning lies in eternity, where whom the ebb has left upon the strand the next flood raises to new heights again. In eternity is every dream fulfilled, and each desire finds its time. There values are in constant flux, and every lot is a winning number, for no one there is bound by time.

But *our* life seems, in fact, like some mad god's bad jest. An endless bankruptcy, a constant quest, an urge to sound the infinite, which fails for lack of breath at the first step, a restless hoping, hurrying, pursuing, that quickly comes to an end in the stream of time, and never leads to any goal.



Then his father's voice once more admonishes the weak dreamer of the need, to act. He feels the pale shade close beside him, feels in his heart the gaze of those pale eyes and still he cannot rouse himself to deeds.

His whole being writhes in pain when that voice sounds in his ear. The whole structure of cleverly contrived ideas which his keen logic has laboriously built up, falls like a house of cards before an infant's breath. He thinks of vengeance, retribution, quick action, but scarcely has he grasped his sword-hilt when the old tremor runs through his limbs and his hand falls limply from his weapon.

In vain he rages at his weakness; he still cannot compel the hour of decision. And at last he falls into his old state, wastes his time in silent brooding, bringing forth, not deeds, but theories to provide a reason for his weakness.

A queer being is man in his madness! he begins to argue.—He acts as proud of his little spark of intelligence as if he were lording it over worlds. And still is just a footloose wretch, swept along like a straw by the flood. He speaks in rapturous tones of the purpose of his being, and puts the interpretation that has its origin in his brain in the place of the iron course of life, which quite autocratically goes its own way, unconcerned with any commentary.

He dreams of great deeds, of directing the universe, thinks up some sort of mission for himself, and puffs himself up like a frog in a puddle. He makes an outcry, moves about, does business, blusters and blasphemes, and never notices that the water he has beaten into foam quickly runs smooth again.

One could fairly burst with laughter when one looks at the lout who now wields the scepter. With what importance does he emphasize every word that slips past his lying lips! He decks himself out like a peacock and struts about in the market-place like a balladsinger. No doubt he thinks that his every silly trick in some way serves the welfare of his kingdom. For everything that a king does is great; even his going to stool becomes a royal act, that does not fail of its effect upon world events.

If his bowels fail to move at the accustomed time a victory may change to defeat—a kingdom may fall in ruins. It would, you may be sure, be well worth while to search the history of the world for what it tells of the jointstools of kings. Through this study much would be learned that has hitherto escaped us.

With what dignity does my uncle carry himself! And yet pale fear lies in his heart and causes him to tremble in his shoes like a criminal being dragged before the court.

The guilt that he took upon him when his ambition set a snare for him weighs him down utterly, raises his hair on end, when in his dreams he hears his brother's curse. All the majesty that molds beneath his ermine robe is just a heap of nonsense.

So I sing the praises of King Worm! He has quite other royal qualities than a shuffling wretch like that, with pale fear always gnawing at his heart.

The worm is the true King of Kings, for none can withhold his tribute, though he has neither horse nor horsemen to enforce his will. The worm is beyond bribery, beyond fault, a knight without fear and without reproach. He behaves always according to his own standards, a real king, who bends to nothing, rules his world according to his will. The worm devours all—kings and beggars—and the genius is to him no more than any fool. He spares neither old nor young, has no regard for sex or age, and is devoid of all hypocrisy.

He is the great leveler of mankind; before his forum neither rank nor title counts. No thinker can boast of his preference, although he himself perhaps takes something from the thinker.

Man in his presumption feels himself the match of any creature living and thinks that everything was made for him. And so he has arranged the universe to suit himself and assigned a meaning and a purpose to everything. Of course it never enters his mind that perhaps other beings also have their art of logic and deduction.

And if this be true, then it is clear that their thinking will be of a special kind adapted to the sphere of life in which their idea of being is rooted.

In the end it all depends upon the premises; for if one presupposes nothing, nothing can be deduced. When once the primary assumption is laid down, the purpose of life follows as a matter of course. What one assumes is the kernel of his thinking, the bridge that leads to understanding of life.

But the assumptions that the brain invents are always tied to their conditions; conditions give form and method to the mind. Granted that the worm is a philosopher, then is his thinking fitted to his nature and to the environment which belongs to him, and since his life obeys different laws, so are the ideas which he forms subject to the logic of his nature, and this defines its own meaning and reason for existence.

A fine conceit, that, by my faith! The jest is tasty, good beyond compare! The worm a philosopher, a profound thinker, filled with the rich results of wisdom! I can see it all before my eyes: The worm among the earnest circle of his brethren, who hang breathless on his words, drinking in the very essence of all truth.

Hear him:

How splendidly my brethren, is the world arranged! No tiniest crumb of earth moves from its place except as our Creator wills it. He has assigned to everything its meaning, and his love shines on all his creatures. But his grace rests especially on us, who are the crown and summit of his work.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, man, the plants, the beetles, and the rest, then he created his heart's favorite, the worm. What, indeed, would have been the sense of creation itself had there not been a being selected by our Maker's holy will, and destined to point out the majesty of the Master's mighty works, to show the end and meaning of existence, and proclaim eternally the praises of the Lord.

The universe exists for the sake of the worm. Plants and animals are in the world so that man may stuff his belly with them and so become in time a dainty bit for us.

And so man lives to feed the worms. Oh, life is wisely ordered; clear as night to me is the Creator's will, the boundless love in all his deeds!

Thus speaks the worm, when what he eats agrees with him. For one of those plump, well-fed chaps, who can scarcely drag his fat around, is ambrosia for the Creator's best-loved children and reveals life's deeper meaning. But when meager fare comes from above, when death sends down a dried up tailor with scarce an ounce of fat upon his bones and flesh that is tougher than his coffin, then the worm loses his good humor, his complacency falls from him. He finds that many things are quite purposeless, begins to criticize the Creator's sacred works, and has doubts of the wisdom of this world. And logic is altogether with him! For what sense or purpose is there in the death of a starveling who brings them naught but skin and bones? A fellow like that should live forever; his corpse is a disgrace to death, arouses doubts about the purpose of existence.

Is this the payment for our loyal faith? For all the praise of the Creator that we have always rendered out of full stomachs and grateful hearts? Has he forgotten his children in their hour of need? Does he no longer see to it, as he was won't to do, that men shall grow plump and fat, so that his worms may honor him in feast? One could almost—may God forgive the sinful thought turn atheist, doubt the very meaning of creation!—

But when the morsels once more come down fatter, men again get on well with the Lord, then the worm also finds his way back to God and zealously voices the Creator's praise, warns his children against Satan's wiles, and proclaims the profundity of eternal wisdom.

But hark! Is that not his father's voice again piercing his heart with gentle admonition? Before his eyes the victim stands boring into his soul with its dead stare and pointing to the sword girt to his side. Horror fills him at that gaze, the sound of that voice, driving the blood back in his heart, setting his mind awirl. But lead lies in his limbs, he cannot force his hand to act.

Timidly he seeks out abandoned roads to walk in, for it seems to him that every glance men cast on him is filled with stern reproach and heavy with fate.

When, earlier, he had left his home to wander far abroad, there remained behind a maid of noble blood, in whose heart love of him burned high. But he has taken pains since his return from foreign lands never to cross her path, and she can no longer still the clamor of her heart.

She tracks him to the quiet paths where he broods away his days and one day steps out before him.

She looks at him with sorrowful eyes, the while her heart beats sadly in her breast. So it is true, what people tell of him? He is sick at heart, his mind is overclouded, and his thoughts range always about things that other men most anxiously avoid lest they become the prey of powers of darkness.

Oh, if only love might bring him light, release him from the grasp of this dark, mysterious urge, which burdens his heart, cripples his spirit!

He halts when he sees the girl before him and looks at her as if he sought to pierce to the bottom of her soul. Then, while a cunning smile plays around his pale lips, he speaks in bitter mockery:

Well, gentle maid, what is love doing now? Spring is at hand, the sap is rising in the trees. How should it be otherwise with man! His whole life revolves around the petty bit of passion with which Nature has endowed him in mockery of the feeble warmth of his poor senses. Lechery blinds his bleary eyes and makes him forget that he is but the slave of death so long as he still coos his love and plays its silly farce.

Death is a voracious fellow. He lies with jaws agape in every grave, ready to gulp his prey. It is love that forever fills his maw. Were it not for love, he would have starved long since. Even the stupidest can see that every cradle has been shaped so that it may later become a coffin.

Love is the opium of the race. It is a proven remedy and gives relief in every case. Drunk with its lecherous heat man can forget that he is cheating himself.

Love shows him things that don't exist; he sees the beginning merely, not the end. When the fever burns, one mounts the other to revel in their brief taste of bliss. They blow their bellies up in spasms of delight, and so make sure that life shall not die out.

Rapturously they rub their hides together and merely make more food for death. They're serving him; for what they call love is just the interlude before the grave.

But say, most noble lady, aren't you feeling ill? Does not my speech offend your modest ear? You are silent; my words shock you; you stare at me in horror. That is not nice of you, my lovely child. One does not always find truth close beside one's path, so that to possess it he heeds but to stoop.

You are a pretty child, and you play fairly well the role that you. Just look at those fresh, dainty cheeks, that rather saucy and conceited little nose, that ripe, red mouth, just made for kissing, those teeth like two rows of lovely pearls. It could even stir the passions of a man like me!

And yet all this you show is but a lie. You are just a silly masquerade, cunningly concealing what lies underneath. That lovely brow, those soft red lips, enchanting, truly bewildering to the senses! But under it all there hides just a death's head, a skull that grins in scorn and mocks at our folly.

That swelling breast, that sweet young body merely covers a skeleton, that hides itself for a little while under the deceitful garb of life, so that it may be present at

our great masked ball.

The silliest farce that was ever devised by man! But it draws, has a full house every night. The dear public is quite delighted and never has enough of the stupid play.

You still stand there in the sun young and fresh as dew and think not of the future that presses on you. But the time that is allotted you will swiftly pass; your corpse goes quickly to the grave. The dainty splendor of your body will be hid, if age has not already graven it with furrows.

You are merely food for worms, no more. For all the plans youth spins are only vain attempts to veil the truth of life. One shuts one's eyes upon reality and hedges oneself behind formulas and systems, cherishes desires that never find fulfillment, and chases madly after figures that quickly vanish in the mist.

If one is disappointed with a house that thought has painfully erected, one hurriedly hunts up another. The old firm changes its name, but the business always keeps right on.

It is surely a strange business that goes on behind the brow of man. Here is a magician's chamber where all things seem unlike what they are. For when man begins what he calls thinking, truth surrenders all her rights. Life becomes a puppet show that serves only to conceal the actual.

And now, my lovely child, I think you have enough. There is not room for everything in your little brain. When some day the worm bores through your skull to find what's hidden there, he'll find little enough, in faith. Almost too little to repay his curiosity.

Farewell! Forbear to cross my path again. The world is large and too full of fools for you to need to stay a virgin. But still, it doesn't matter much. There are rascals here in legions, and a rascal makes it his especial care to propagate his kind, so that the race may be kept up.

With downcast gaze the maiden leaves the place. Her dream is shattered, the flowers that love had brought to bloom are wilted. The strain has been too much for her tender soul. Madness grips at her weary heart. Unaware of time, she harkens to mysterious voices that whisper softly to her from out hidden worlds. They call, they lure, urge her on with tender insistence. In her mind she sees hands that gently beckon.—Then the river takes her to its moist bosom, and from its waves her path leads to the grave.

Slowly, heavily, anxiously the days drag by, as if time were slowly drying up. Every night the same dream torments the king, and awful fear gnaws at his false heart. Too dear has been the crown he wears, heavier, almost, than the guilt that lies upon him.

The queen is numb with deadening pain; pale horror sits upon her brow. No smile e'er curls her set lips now; a dark premonition chills her soul. She feels the curse that sits upon their walls and, wordless, crushes down their lives.

One day is very like another. The same words are exchanged, every gesture becomes just a senseless habit.

Life seems like a puppet play that goes on and on in the gloomy rooms. Every act is done mechanically, of itself, like the running of the sand in an hourglass. It is as if an unknown hand were pulling the figures ever round and round in the same performance.

Only the pale prince understands the play, since that night when his dead father's ghost appeared to him and revealed hidden things.

But the memory of that hour is deeply graven in his heart. He can never rid himself of it; the dead man's voice calls to him from every stone to remind him grimly of the awful deed.

In vain he strives to break the spell in which his knowledge binds him. He thinks, and thinks again, inventing with keen logic ever new reasons with which to confound and scatter the demons that lurk in the dark corners of his soul.

In vain! He cannot fool himself; foul guilt is not to be repaid with words.

So awful is the knowledge that has come to him that it stifles his impulse to act. There is no help in suffering, in inner flagellation; the dead man's admonition gives him no strength of will. He dreams of deeds, brings forth just ideas.

What is revenge? he asks in scorn. Does it really repay guilt incurred? It would be atonement if what is past could be in some way changed. But I am denied the strength for that.

Let us suppose that I do bare my sword, plunge the steel deep into the murderer's breast—what would be the result of my deed?

The earth would cover his corpse; worms would gorge on his flesh. Reputation matters little to the worm; he eats the murderer as he eats the gentleman. Moral qualities are unknown to him and cannot spoil his appetite.

Let us even suppose that I refuse to cut short his thread of life, to play fate to him for the sake of vengeance. How would the song end then?

Well, then he would still drag his sluggish body through a few more years of life and die, as we all must die. They would bury him with pomp and circumstance and erect a monument to honor him, as is the custom with men of his station.

But the gluttons in the earth cannot be fooled by such vain mummery. They will gnaw at the tidbits of his carcass with the same silent satisfaction as if he had never made the slightest stir, till there remains of him only a heap of bones, which itself will also slowly turn to earth.

But if the results are just the same, then done or not done matters not; my revenge would have no purpose. He will not escape the eager worms whether he dies upon his pillow or I hurry him along. In either case the worms will get him soon enough.

And, besides, one should never shorten a rogue's life, for a quick death is to his advantage, it frees him from the shadow of his deeds. And, too, revenge does not become us, for there is something of the rogue in all of us. When I reflect upon it, roguery is as necessary to the world as bread. Without it how could life be borne? Meanness makes life swing along more lightly; if there were not a rogue hidden in us, the burden of existence would crush us utterly.

But it seems one can't cajole a ghost with reasons; they stick obstinately to appearances and have no sense of logic or of law.

Again his voice assails my ears, telling of the rights of fathers, the duty of children, and spurring me to the grim task of vengeance which is revolting to my very nature and only heightens the damned conflict in me that is wounding my soul to the death. So, logic, child of Satan, help me once again to rid myself of the thoughts that are curdling my heart's blood in my veins!

The duty of children! Ha, ha! A lovely word sanctified from of old by long tradition! He is your father;—she is your mother. What then? Because he is your father you belong to him forever, your will must always bow to his will, you are never to go your own way. He is your father, he gave you life, therefore you stand for ever in his debt.

For that venerable book from which men draw their highest wisdom bids us:

Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God hath given thee!

A clever book, in sooth, a cunning law! Just rightly made to blind the eyes of fools; but it means nothing to the impartial mind that critically weighs every word.

Now, let me see what the words do mean! He is my father; — she is my mother. —On a sultry night—the stags Were bellowing—my father felt the heat, too, in his blood, and clasped in lecherous embrace the woman who was to become my mother, and she responded to his kisses with fervor like his own.

I was the outcome. Did either think of that while passion burned in them that night? Nothing mattered to them then. They were bent then only on their pleasure, and their passion held no thought of its results.

Did anyone ask me whether I desired to appear as guest upon this earth? Was either father or mother at all aware of it when I, quite against right and reason, was tossed into this sfilly world to take up the heritage that rests upon us like a curse and that only death lifts from us?

Who gave them the right to call me into being? A god, or a devil, who rejoices in my torment, and spreads life to feed his pleasure?

Then those makers of my body have an obligation to *me*, to the very brink of the grave they're in *my* debt. The child's right is the parents duty.

Trouble me no longer then, pale ghost! By what right do you demand that I shall be the avenger of your death?

The brother who in an evil hour struck you down with murderous hand committed but one murder in his life. But you murdered me a thousand times when you called me into being. The long, long torment to which you condemned me is far worse than the swift stroke of murder.

You have no claim upon my sword; you still have the right to waylay the murderer, who, impelled by blind ambition to exchange his role for yours, basely struck you down from ambush.

A change of roles in the comedy of life! Why all the outcry, all the solemn gestures? For me life itself is hard enough to bear. If I had had the strength I should long ago have made an end of the game, but knowledge lamed my courage. So I must carry on with the farce until some other hand lowers the curtain.

He leaves the castle, goes brooding on his way through foreign lands, over strange seas, until the last frontier beckons to him also.

* * *

The heaven is gray. The desert yawns.

A mighty sphinx of smooth black marble lies outstretched upon the waste of fine brown sand, her gaze lost in dreary, infinite remoteness.

Nor hate nor love dwells in that gaze; her eyes are misted, as by some deep dream, and over her dumb lips' cold pride there hovers, gently smiling, just eternal silence.

The third wanderer gazes into the eyes of the sphinx, but he can never solve her riddle; wordless he sinks on the desert sands.

IV The Fourth Road

THE sun smiles, the sky is radiant blue, the happy lark pours out a jubilant song. The old oaks rustle intimately, whispering delicious secrets to each other.

In the valley the brook chatters happily, leaps, chuckling, over the smooth cobblestones, and hurries on impetuously toward the blue horizon. Nothing can hold it to one place; its picture of existence is one of constant flux which anxiously avoids all fixity.

A gentle breath disturbs the green floor of the meadow, and grass and flower are bathed in the morning dew, which mirrors wonders in a million drops, like the silent, magic pageant of a fairy tale.

Butterflies in hundreds rock to and fro on dainty chalices, sipping with quiet satisfaction the sweet juice of beauty. Almost too rich is the abundance that is offered them; they rush from feast to feast and nourish their brief span of life with nectar and the fragrance of flowers, imbibed in drunken orgies.

The bees hum in the mild, warm air, from every tree and bush come trilling, twittering, chirping, and in the golden sunlight dance gnats in happy swarms.

In the shadow lizards dart about old stones, the splendor of their bodies shimmering with magic brilliance when an errant sun, beam steals through the waving foliage and weaves a thousand patterns on the ground.

From the neighboring village sounds the clear beat of the hammer and the old blacksmith's song, as busily he swings his sinewy arm, pounds out the music hidden in hard steel. A white wraith of smoke struggles aloft, to be lost in the upper blue and vanish like the image of some spirit that a magic word has freed from the spell that bound it.

The whole world seems too beautiful and carefree, such a picture of joy, of untroubled happiness. The sun is laughing, space itself is laughing, and impish giggling sounds from every bush as if all the earthly difficulties that drag the soul down into the depths to hide from it its chance of resurrection, had vanished with the night.

All La Mancha glitters in festal garb, proclaiming to all the world the merry tale that one of her sons has issued forth to free mankind from its hereditary woes.

Many before him have ridden off into distant places, defying death and hardship, to search out that luring El Dorado, at whose gate no man yet has knocked, because the happy time is not yet fulfilled of whose coming a thousand minstrels sang.

Far, far away, beyond the horizon which marks the final goal of our great yearning, lies a lost paradise, fenced round with a network of red gold, a vale of life and deep delight, where every wish is granted and every joy is pure.

It is a green island in an unknown sea, its strange, enticing splendor beckoning out of the blue distance, its image sinking into the pain-filled hearts of men like a tender dream, a dream that

puts forth a thousand brightly colored flowers—and sends heroes forth on roads strewn thick with battle.

They are the elect whom that distance lures, guardians of the Holy Grail of the ideal, knights without fear, who, lost in dreams, keep on their course toward the realm of stars, the land of miracles.

And none returns to his old home. They wander, till their eyes grow dim, till all their vital force is spent; and die unwept on foreign soil, as far from home as from the miracle.

Their bones lie bleaching on hot desert sands, their bodies rot in gloomy forests, death sweeps them down into deep chasms; he follows in their footsteps like a shadow.

But others follow in the fading trail, bidding defiance to eternal Fate, for a deep call sounds incessant in their ear, and their eyes behold a distant realm of wonders. It lures and beckons, bewildering their sense as irresistibly as a siren's song, till they can no longer rest in safety, but set out for unknown worlds, that beckon dreamily out of the blue distance.

Now a new hero has arisen in the world, one whom his village can no longer hold, who has gone forth, a protector of the oppressed, a guardian of virtue and justice, than whom the world had seen no nobler. With a strong arm will he shield innocence and put down vile arrogance and tyranny, so that the world may live in happiness.

Therefore La Mancha glitters today in festal garb, and smiles as sweetly as a lovely bride while dressing for her wedding; the sky rains roses.

The road winds among green hills and along a brook to the field of Montiel, whence the gaze may sweep quite to the horizon, with nothing to obstruct the vision. Two strange figures come into view, riding unhurriedly down into the valley. The one tall and gaunt, a very picture of famine, with cheeks so thin and hollow it seems as if they must touch inside his mouth. A picture of misery that calls for pity and at the same time moves to laughter.

An ancient suit of armor protects his lean body, rusty greaves cover his shriveled legs, and on his head he wears an inverted basin in lieu of helmet. A long sword hangs from his belt, and in his right he holds a pike that looks not unlike a knightly lance.

The noble knight bestrides a steed whose every rib stands out in bold relief, a beast so starved and rattle-boned it might have been begotten by its master.

A donkey trots cheerfully along at its side, plump, sturdy, and well-fed. In its saddle sprawls comfortably a fat little man, gnawing contentedly at the drumstick of a fowl, smacking his lips at every bite, as if the world had nothing more to offer.

The knight gazes dreamily at the white clouds that float quietly across the sky. A deep sigh escapes him, for a great love burns in his breast, a love which he feeds with his blood so that it may bloom and flourish forever, like the Vestal fire which never dies out.

His heart is faithful to the noble lady whom he has chosen for his mistress, for whose sake he has forsaken his home to fill the world with the fame of his deeds.

Meanwhile the fat fellow critically examines his chicken bone to see if perhaps some little bit of meat has escaped his teeth. Then he flings it carelessly into the field, wipes his fat lips with a broad hand, and belches contentedly, like a peasant who has just enjoyed a frugal meal.

And so they trot comfortably along, two beings with no objective, surrendering themselves to chance and whatever the hour may bring. Now the last hill is conquered, and the Field of Montiel spreads wide before them, bathed in sunshine and the fragrance of flowers.

Now the knight halts his steed, and, shielding his keen eyes with his left hand, stares into the distance that spreads like a green carpet before his gaze.

Then every muscle in his thin body tightens, and his fist clamps more firmly about his lance. Fire blazes from his eyes, and every nerve is set for action. He speaks eagerly to the stout man:

My son, do you see the giants yonder in the field? Here is an adventure ready to my hand. Just look how they wave their long arms at me and threaten me with their huge fists! The fools think they can strike terror to my heart and do not dream how much it longs for action. Look to yourselves, vile creatures, thieving rabble! One lone knight dares defy you, ready to water the soil with your blood!

Patience, noble master!, the stout churl says: It seems to me you are out of your senses. Those are not giants that you see there; they're windmills flapping their sails. Just strain your ears a bit and you'll hear their clatter!

What are you driveling about? exclaims the tall one. You're crazed with fear and everything looks like something else to you. But enough of that! I have delayed too long already to satisfy my knightly honor. Forward, my noble steed, forward to deeds of derring-do! O noble lady, queen of my heart, behold your knight now mock at fear that he may be worthy of your proud soul!

He sets his lance in rest and digs the spurs into the thin ribs of his steed. The nag, unused to such treatment, dashes across the field as if possessed of a fiend.—S-s-s-t! goes the mill. The lance breaks in two, and horse and rider lie upon the earth, their limbs twisted, their lean bodies bruised.

And now the stout one comes trotting up and fills the air with lamentation and reproach:

Didn't I tell you, my poor master? Now you can see for yourself that these are no giants, but only millwheels turning in the wind. Why couldn't you understand that? A blind man could have seen it with his hands. Your craze for deeds just played a trick on you.

And to your harm, Master! You can't deny that. May heaven guard us against any more of such deeds or our excursion will come to a sudden end.

My son, groaned the knight in pain, you merely see things as you must, because God has denied to you a deeper insight. Heaven has not granted to everyone that he

should be able to see things in the right light. So just be content with the lot that has fallen to you, and the stream of your life will flow smoothly. He who is not endowed with that divine gift never feels the duty that rests on us, of relieving the pains and misfortunes of existence.

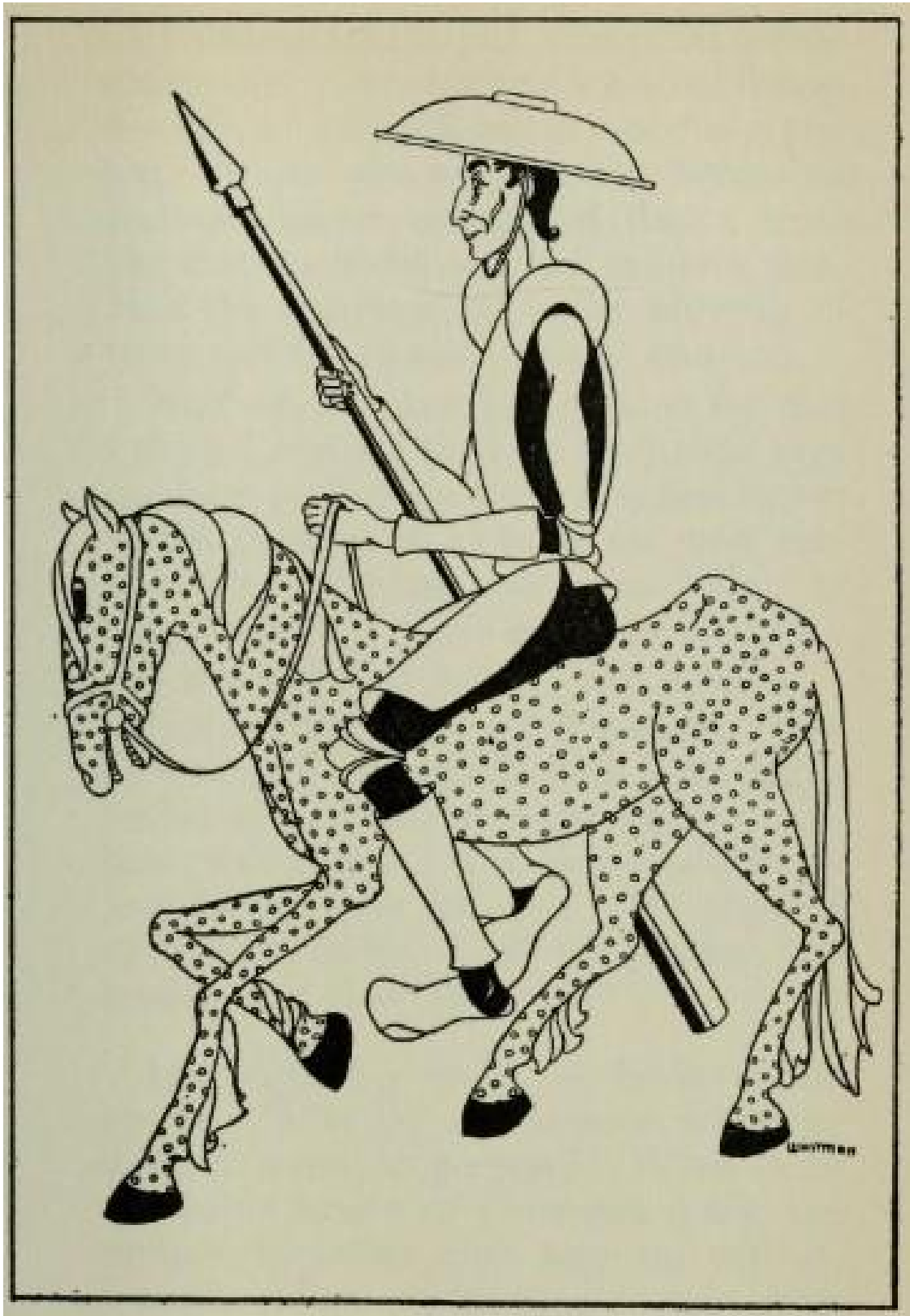
Your simple nature merely sees the hardship of the hour, and when that trifling worry is removed finds the world a paradise once more. Your ideas come from your stomach and intestines. It is hunger that moves you to act. So the faint twinkling of the stars, profound poetic feeling, never lead you to see the world and men with other eyes.

You're right about that, my dear master. When my stomach growls my good humor vanishes. The sweetest poetry can't help me then, and a bit of bacon counts for more with me than all that starry vault that enraptures you and sets you in such a heat. It's true I'm just a simple peasant's son, but my belly has a rare appetite and will hold its own against any nobleman's.

A roast fowl has a bully taste, and even a goose is not to be despised. And if my purse is well filled, too, then life feels mighty good to me.

There just is nothing pleasanter than to feel your belly slowly swelling out while you are filling your stomach. That's a genuinely Christian experience; for, believe me, I never feel so much inclined to forgive my neighbor everything, to take the whole world into a loving embrace, as when, after a full belly has set me to belching, I can stretch my limbs at ease.

And if there's nothing else at hand, I can do very well on bread and salt. A slice of onion makes it nicer, and life is still not hard to bear.



At bottom that's the way it is with everybody. Even little Grayling here could teach you that. Take it from me, the beast is not so dumb as people think. My donkey is as sensible as a human being and always knows just where the saddle chafes him. Just try to fill his saddlebags too full, and he will get as nasty as a person. When you see it you're astonished and can hardly understand that a beast like that can think and feel so like a man. He'll shy and buck and strike out with all fours and act as mean as any man can.

And when at last he's gone so far that I think I'm going to burst with sheer rage and have periled my soul's salvation by my savage cursing, he looks at me with mischief shining from both eyes. He's as happy as a thief who's got away with it—just like a human being; I say it again.

But put him before a full manger, where he can chew contentedly with both cheeks puffed out, then that false heart of his turns soft as wax. The purest neighborly love beams from his eyes. No angel is so innocent as he. I tell you, master, he's human, just plain human.

May lightning strike —, broke in the knight. Why do you keep on jabbering without sense or purpose? When once that lively tongue of yours gets going, the swiftest horseman can't keep up with it. I speak of something; you drag in your donkey. What has your gray beast got to do with the scoundrels who were standing there right before my eyes?

That's the question I'm asking you, my noble master. You saw giants where there were only windmills. Then you came at me with your stuff about the stars that no sane Christian can understand. What has the starry vault in common with the windmills?

Now I see clearly, my son, that you don't understand me and still hold to your false opinion that those were windmills and not giants.

And you, noble knight, still won't believe me that windmills are windmills and not giants? That tumble must surely have befuddled your brains or else you wouldn't say things like that.

But I tell you, you don't understand me. Now pay attention so you can get it clear. The windmills that you see here in the field—

Now you admit, yourself, that they are only windmills, the stout one hastily interrupts.

Oh, keep still and listen to what I am saying. Can't you control that loose tongue of yours even for a moment? Now, once more—but don't interrupt me. The windmills that you see here in the field are really windmills. That is beyond doubt. But I swear to you by the sacred blood of Christ that they were really giants who were just now transformed into windmills.

When I first saw them in the field they were twisting their uncouth bodies and threatening me with fierce gestures to break my strength of will. I very plainly saw them clench their fists, and from some distance heard their outcries, which sounded like the howling of wild beasts.

But, noble master, think what you are saying—the stout man can no longer restrain himself. I saw the windmills at the same time that you did, and I swear that they were not giants. And my ear caught no outcry of any kind; I only heard a gentle distant clatter.

But that is just what I was trying to tell you, the knight breaks in once more. That you saw only windmills and not giants seems to me now as clear as day and easy to explain, because enchantment clouded your vision. But I saw plainly that they were giants, no magic could blind *my* eyes.

And when I, aflame with lust of battle, thrust my spurs into the flanks of my noble steed, to prove the power of my arm upon those wretches that I saw before me, a necromancer whose enmity I have aroused, quickly transformed the monsters into windmills, so that I might not achieve the glory of the victory. Now do you understand, my son, what happened to me?

I don't understand it, but of course I have to believe you. I only hope that some such commandant-sir will not always be crossing our road, or I shall never have any more peace in my life. The devil take such masquerading! An ordinary brain can't understand it.

The knight now mounts his steed cautiously and painfully, the stout fellow holding his stirrup and helping him into the saddle. They set out at a moderate pace on their way. As before, the knight keeps gazing into the distance, while the stout one carefully inspects things close at hand on the chance of picking up something with which he can later regale his palate.

Thus slowly the hours of the day drag by, and when the sun has sunk low in the sky, throwing a red glow over the distant clouds, the stout one sees before them beside the road an inn that seems to him just the right thing for the night.

A swineherd is blowing lustily on his horn to call his charges, who at the moment are wallowing delightedly in a mud puddle, back to their barn. The knight's ear catches the sound of the horn, calling him back from his dreams. His eye falls on the crumbling building, which is instantly pictured in his brain as a castle.

My son, did you hear the blast of that horn? he inquires of the stout knave at his side. The warder's eye has already spied us out. It looks to me as if they were lowering the drawbridge to admit us to the courtyard of the castle. They are going to receive us in real knightly fashion, according to ancient custom.

The stout one, stares all about in astonishment, but is unable to discover either the drawbridge or the castle about which his master is speaking as assuredly as if they lay right before his eyes.

Do you mean the tavern, there? With the best will in the world that's all I can see, though I'm almost staring my eyes out.

That is a castle. Anyone can see that. There is the castellan coming to welcome us into the stronghold, as is fitting with persons of our station.

If that's a castle, then I must say it's hard to tell one from a tavern, opines the stout churl, pinching his left ear. And the fellow yonder looks to me like a swineherd. He doesn't look like a chaplain to me. I only hope that commandant-sir that played such a trick with the windmills hasn't been at work here.

The stout fellow climbs thoughtfully from his donkey and assists the thin knight from his saddle. Then they both enter the inn and make themselves at home beside the round table.

The stout one promptly demands something to sustain the inner man and soon is sharpening his teeth on a mutton chop, while his master regales himself with cheese.

They pass the night in a shed, which seems to our knight to be a stately apartment. The stout knave stretches himself out comfortably and soon is snoring fit to shake the walls. But the knight lies there on the hay, thinking of his distant lady—who was born only of his fancy—until at last sleep closes his eyes also.

Morning finds them both upon their way again, the knight in eager outlook for new adventures that might augment the fame of his deeds and proclaim his heroism to an indifferent world. And so they journey far and wide, wherever chance directs their feet or great adventures

beckon to our knight.

Many a stout combat must our knight sustain; his wondrous body is witness of them, for one cannot find a spot on it that's sound and free from scars. But his urge for deeds remains unshaken. His hand is always on his swordhilt. He never hesitates when the hour strikes.

'Tis true his deeds mostly turn out ill for him and bring him only wounds, calamity, and pain. But still his will remains unconquered, despondency never breaks his valiant mood, which ever thirsts for new achievements.

He sees everything in his own light; he makes a world for himself in his own image, a world so remote from that in which he lives, that he finds himself in constant conflict with it, but never lowers the banner of his will.

He is a creator, who carries in his breast the miraculous power that turns dreams into realities, makes oases out of deserts.

Men pursue him with bitter mockery and think he is not quite sane. His strange actions often amuse them, and it makes their own behavior seem more sensible when they compare it with this fool's delusions.

But usually he is at outs with his time. He annoys other people because he is always trying to force things out of the ancient course that has been sanctified by tradition, is an inheritance from gray antiquity.

He who sets himself against ancient law and custom, does not go along with others on the path that was laid out and traveled by the fathers, does not fit into the world of stark reality, where the ancient cogwheels always mesh together to keep things going in the accustomed way.

In this world there are no more miracles. Here is the realm of sober thoughts, that have long forgotten how to be astonished and see the world and its affairs always in their workday clothes. And though the garment be both spotted and torn, and its color bleached by the sun, still it does not disturb the settled rhythm of events, and it wakens in the mind no questions about unknown and puzzling things.

Of course a little poetry is not to be despised, provided one does not forget the boundary where fantasy parts company with reality, and dreams do not mistake themselves for life, and sober judgment is not shaken.

When one has discharged the serious duties of the day and gives himself at evening to his well-earned rest, then poetry has a quite beneficent effect and greatly helps digestion. One reads of starry dreams, nights of enchantment, of gentle fairies, dwarfs, and monsters, listens to the sausage gently sizzling on the hearth, and dream fuses with reality. This does not disturb one's pose of mind, and sanity remains unshaken.

But he who can no longer find the frontier that divides the land of dreams from life is a fool who chases after miracles and forgets the roads of reason.

They are visionaries, always in pursuit of a miracle, lost souls, who despise the customs of their fathers and toss their torches into the sanctuary the Philistine has industriously erected.

They are rebels against the old morality, who have burst the sacred bond of custom which the centuries have so strongly knit by tradition and pious repetition. They scoff at every standard, impiously shatter the old tables of the law, and break through all the bounds that hold the world together, leaving the mind afloat upon a shoreless sea.

A dream becomes for them the meaning and the purpose of existence. They shape the world to suit their wishes and perish in the madness that consumes them.

Of that race is the noble knight. Like the gods, he sits enthroned in a realm of dreams that his own fancy has begotten. This realm becomes for him an inner reality. He does not see that the world in which he dwells is in eternal battle with his world.

He is troubled by no inner conflict, so he is always ready for prompt action. No warning thought e'er halts his arm when he draws his sword to strike. He is a stranger to all indecision; his whole being is of one mold, and so he's never tortured by the silent pangs of doubt.

He acts because the deed calls to him, feels himself the guardian of justice, with a purpose in life to fulfill, to which the destiny of his time has called him. He believes passionately in the role that has been set for him and feels himself a champion of the right.

But the world does not understand his dream, will not sacrifice fact to fantasy, which glitters, it is true, in brilliant colors, but ne'ertheless cannot replace reality. So no one thanks him for his lust for deeds; even those whom he "rescues" become his enemies when he tries to turn them to new paths illumined only by the flickering starlight of ideals.

Once master and servant are riding on their way, when in the distance they behold a troop approaching them with heavy tread. There are twelve men, strongly ironed, dragging heavy shackles on both hands and feet. They are all walking in a row and have a chain around their necks, holding their heads like giant pearls upon a rosary.

Four wardens come behind the row, two on foot and two on horse. They are driving the prisoners before them, plodding slowly toward their goal.

Do you see the men coming toward us there? the knight inquires earnestly of his fat squire. It looks to me as if an adventure offers here that may test the strength of my arm.

Better be careful, the stout fellow quickly interposes. Tame that impatience of yours a bit that has so often gotten us into serious trouble. If I am not mistaken those are convicts being taken to the galleys by royal command to atone for their crimes.

If I understand correctly these men are being forced to go where they do not want to go. Then I have appeared just in time to release them from the yoke. Is it not my duty to interfere to free men who are themselves too weak to resist the compulsion put upon them?

But remember that those are the king's slaves, admonished the other once more. They are criminals whom you wish to protect, men, who, denounced by the Holy Brotherhood, are now to receive the wages of their sins, as law and right require.

Who has given the king the right to impose the yoke of slavery on those men yonder? The king should protect his subjects instead of oppressing them and turning them over to brutal despotism. Save your advice, my son. I know already what accords with the lofty obligations of knighthood.

By this time they have come up to the troop of strangers, plodding along under their load of chains. The knight stops in the middle of the road and inquires politely of the first of the bailiffs, who he is and what he intends to do with these men who are thus bound in chains and fetters.

The bailiff stares in astonishment at this curious looking man. Then replies good-humoredly:

My dear sir, if it isn't too much trouble, just ask the rogues themselves what they have done. They'll not try to hide the truth from you; they'll be quite glad to satisfy your curiosity.

The knight then asks the first of the men in chains why he is on his way to the galleys.

Love was my undoing, noble sir, says he, with a sly wink. I fell in love, now I'm in chains.

Since when have men been sent to the galleys for falling in love with a woman? the knight inquires in astonishment. I never heard of such a thing in all my life.

Well now, my lord, the rogue replies, it wasn't a woman to whom I gave my heart. They caught me just as I had my arms around a bundle of linen that had laid hold on my affections.

And you? inquired the knight of the next man. For what are you wearing chains?

He is a singer, the third man broke in hastily. That is, he is going with us because he sang so wonderfully when it would have been better to keep still.

Do you mean to tell me that this man has been thrown in chains because he sang of love and mighty deeds?

Quite right, my lord. He sang of mighty deeds when the executioner put the thumb-screws on him. He sang all the notes he'd ever learned. And so he's on his road to the galleys.

The knight keeps on and questions every man in the gang, hearing from each a new tale of which he hardly understands the half. And when the last of them has opened his heart, the champion tightens his grip on his lance and addresses the galley slaves in a loud voice:

As far as I can understand you, none of you is going willingly to the place you are bound for. Fate has dealt harshly with you. You have found neither love nor pity. The judges have not granted you the right which even the fallen may claim. So I must myself give you your rights, as is my knightly duty.

Then he turns to the chief bailiff and with noble dignity says to him:

My good man, you have heard what I just said. So take the chains off these suffering people so that each may go on his way in freedom. God in heaven must judge their deeds, not you, for you cannot read the hearts of men. These victims have done nothing to you, and it is not to any man's honor to be the executioner of his kind.

But if any be so blind as to oppose my will, then my good sword shall prove me right and give its aid to injured innocence.

My dear sir, you are quite mad, replies the bailiff sternly. Be on your way, and do not meddle with matters which your poor brain can't understand.

You are the son of a harlot and a scoundrel!

When our brave knight has shouted these words in a rage, he dashes at the bailiff, lance in rest. The bailiff, who has not expected such an outcome, falls from his horse, badly injured. The other bailiffs hasten to his aid, but are met by our knight, with drawn sword.

However, the galley slaves are not asleep, and they promptly seize upon the chance of the moment. Having broken their chain upon the stones, they help one another out of their irons. Very soon stones are flying like hail about the ears of the surprised wardens, who abandon the

field in rapid flight.

Then the knight calls his troop together and, enthroned upon his steed, addresses them in loud, clear tones:

My noble gentlemen, I am very glad that with God's help I have been able to break your chains, so that you are once more men among men. But for noble hearts gratitude is a duty. So take up these chains from which my arm has freed you, bear them upon your shoulders to Toboso, where dwells the mistress of my heart, the loveliest lady that the world has ever seen. Take her, I pray you, greetings from her knight; tell her how I freed you from your bondage. Then each of you may go his way.

Sir Knight, answers one of the gallows-birds, we thank you for what you have done. But what you now ask of us is beyond all reason, if we are to escape the Holy Brotherhood. Farewell! May God reward you for your deed! But don't keep us here longer; the place does not look wholesome to me.

You are a mean, ungrateful wretch! cries the knight furiously. A man with no ideals in his heart, not worthy of the freedom he enjoys. But I swear by God's Holy blood that you shall take that iron on your back, you scoundrel, you damned limb of Satan, and shall carry it where I send you.

Then the rogue gives a signal to the others. They come back and form a circle with their rescuer in the middle. Then they begin to administer to him a stoning such as they had just inflicted on the bailiffs.

The knight tries, to be sure, to ward off the missiles with his shield, but he cannot protect his whole body and, struck by a stone, he falls from his horse. One of them quickly robs him of the cloak he wears; another snatches his mantle from the stout squire. Then, mocking and derisive, they make off.

There they lie, master and servant, horse and donkey, together, scarce able to stir a limb because of their wounds, but at last the stout fellow regains his power of speech:

Well, there you have it; that's the end of the song. All this would have been spared us, if you hadn't tossed my words to the winds. But your lust for deeds has turned everything topsy-turvy, and keeps us always jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. It almost seems as if your wits had left you, for you are always at war with common sense.

Now you have insult added to injury. The very men you had just set free turn against their liberator. Oh, master, you don't know the human heart well enough!

You always see it in the glamor of a dream and take no account of the stark reality, which is stronger than your kingdom of shadows.

My son, I will not say that you are wrong, nor is it your fault if things are always pictured in your brain other than they are.

Of course it is distressing that the hands I have set free should be raised against me. But that seems to be the lot to which my fate has destined me.

But in the heart of the most depraved there is still a tiny spark of that higher world, faintly glowing, deep hidden in the darkness, waiting for the breath of freedom to kindle it to flame.

I gave the rogues their freedom again and sent them to that distant place where sits enthroned the mistress of my heart, she who inspires me to bold deeds. But they, fresh freed from chains, could not understand what was stirring in their souls. Still, some day the hour will strike for them.

That will be a long while yet, opined the stout one. You'll see water burn before the time arrives that you say God has set for you.

And as for the lady of Toboso whom you revere as if she were the immaculate Mother of God, I really don't know just what to think. I know her very well, the cork gatherer's daughter. Toboso is not far from our village.

Now she's a strapping, sturdy wench and can lift a sack from the floor as well as the strongest peasant around. And as for her gift of gab, God save me! She sure has hair on her chest and can toss the stoutest knight about as if he were a gingerbread man. And she has a voice gosh, the bastard! When she whispers something to you she fairly bursts your eardrum.

Oh, she's a real girl, you bet! But that you have set her up as a princess, the chosen of your knightly heart, that's what I can't understand.

Because your eyes are blinded by enchantment, the knight breaks in hurriedly. You always see the matter in the wrong light. You are just like those knaves whom I freed from their chains. But when at last the enchantment is dissolved, then even you will recognize at once that the fair one who has captured my heart deserves to wear the crown of the world.

I hear quite plainly what you're saying, but it gets harder and harder for me to understand you. And besides, it's tiresome to keep digging into things when I can never get to the bottom of them. But there's one thing I wish you would tell me. How is it that your misfortunes have never disillusioned you?

What we've gone through together is certainly not all just a dream. Of course you're always talking about some magic spell that makes me see things in the wrong shape. But this spell looks too genuine to me. If all the bloody noses, broken skulls, and bruised limbs that I have thus far gotten in your service were magic illusions, then I want to tell you the magic was altogether too impressive. The witchery seems just a bit too strong to me. You simply can't tell it from reality.

That's quite true, my son, our knight says seriously; it is very hard to tell reality from dream. For every reality was first a dream, and every dream is trying to make itself reality. It is the power of faith that makes reality, and reality that wakes no dreams is life that dies out like water on the sand—a seed that has lost its power to germinate. You ask why I am not disillusioned with life and am always ready for new deeds. Because deep in my soul flow streams of fire, my eye sees distant worlds, a new country, surrounded by wild floods and storm, which no mortal has yet trod.

Deep tones ring in my ears, and the bliss of heaven is in my soul. Behold! That distant world inspires me to act, gives my heart firmness and strength to overcome all hesitance.

If the Creator had not made my order, the knights who, devoured by an inner urge, set off toward distant goals, this life would long since have moldered quite away and reality would have fallen into dust. No field would any more bear fruit, the whole world would have become a desert, the last hope would have faded.

It is we who carry the new seed in our hearts. The feeble spark which, already half-extinguished, only we can blow again to flame.

If some day men plow under the last shoot from which our ancient line has sprung, then the end of time will have come; the world will be like a fallow field, and life will die out in the germ.

Next morning they take their way into the mountains, where our knight seeks out strange trails, while the stout knave discovers a purse filled with golden ducats.

They ride on thus throughout the day, until evening descends upon them slowly, and the peaks in the west glow with the red of sunset. On silent wings night overtakes them; a thousand stars come out, and all the world seems like a fairy tale.

The knight sits dreaming on a crag, following with his eyes the starbeams that penetrate the place. The stout squire, still waking, lies stretched upon his cloak and broods about his master's deeds:

My master is a queer old owl, I must say. The longer I stay in his service the harder it is for me to understand him. Sometimes he talks as learnedly as a book, so that one can swear to every word he says. Then he turns as stupid as a mule and dreams about deeds that a child would be ashamed of.

Sometimes what he is saying sounds to me as certain as the Amen in church. Then I can see the world and things almost in his light. At other times everything he says seems to me just a lying tale out of Satan's own mouth.

I only hope the island he has promised me isn't in the moon, too, like so many of the other things he talks about. I often ask myself why I have followed him all this time. He has torn me away from my old world, although his madness was as clear to me as day.

But somehow I feel that nobody else is going to give me an island; and I'd never be able to get one for myself. In fact he is setting the table for me at which sometime later I'll eat my fill. I live only because he gives me life; without him I could hardly continue to exist.

That he is a fool one can see at a glance, but his folly keeps the man alive, and it certainly has not left me to starve. So, God bless the madness that sustains us, and my knight of the mournful countenance!

And thus they traverse countries to and fro, meet with adventures beyond number, till at the last the Great Evening settles slowly down upon them. 'Tis then they see the desert spread before them—

Now, are you really going to ride into the desert? the stout one asks, while his heart stands still. Is there no limit to your madness! Thus far I have gone with you day after day, and have followed you like your shadow. But this is too much! Here is the place where we part company.

Farewell! Unless you think better of it, you just must bear the consequences yourself. Death beckons to you yonder. He has fooled you all along and dangled enchanted worlds before your eyes until reason has fled from you.

The knight does not listen to the stout knave's words, but stares with burning eyes into the distance. Meanwhile the little man turns his donkey, and slowly sets out to re-trace the path to his old world.

He lives a long time, comes to regard himself as master and thinks that he has grasped the whole of wisdom. From his seed is that brood descended which is always able to catch fortune on the wing and keeps its filthy belly comfortably full. But they never dream of that realm off there among the stars, of the unheard-of splendor of the far, blue distance. For them the seat of the soul is in the purse, by which they measure human dignity. If the purse is empty, the value of the man is slight. For God first made the purse, then made man.

But the knight pushes on toward the desert. His steed can hardly carry even his gaunt body now—his hour draws near, his course is run—

* * *

The heaven is gray. The desert yawns.

A mighty sphinx of smooth black marble lies outstretched upon the waste of fine brown sand, her gaze lost in dreary, infinite remoteness.

Nor hate nor love dwells in that gaze; her eyes are misted, as by some deep dream, and over her dumb lips cold pride there hovers, gently smiling, just eternal silence.

The knight looks the sphinx in the eye with steady gaze. — An adventure, his pale lips murmur weakly.

The last! The words sound softly from the distance: wordless he sinks on the desert sands.

V The Fifth Road

THE ancient cloister lies in utter quiet, as unworldly, as detached from human cares and worries, as if life here ran its own separate course, untouched by the storm and stress of the times.

The ancient walls seem sunk in silent meditation, and from every stone breathes profound peace, which no profane sound disturbs. Oblivion dwells behind these walls, and many a being in whose brain the pains of life burned like a fire, many a being whose soul bled in silent agony, finds here his peace of heart again.

Here existence runs its silent cycle, and, obeying its own peculiar laws, sets its own rhythm as it moves.

The sun already stands low on the horizon, and the evening settles gently down on field and meadow. The ancient cloister garden lies dreaming. Silence slips, soft-shod, through the woods. But when mild breezes stir the leaves, they murmur softly, like a distant organ tone, wakening trembling harmonies in the soul.

The monks walk silently along the ancient paths, their lips moving in soundless prayer, that wells up from the depths of their souls and wings its way straight to the throne of God.

A soft twilight fills the church, flowing in through the narrow windows, awakening in all it touches that hidden soul that lies, bound by deep spells, in wood and stone.

The old stained windows cast a glory of their own over the carved stone figures, whose gaze is fixed upon the luminous distances that spread magically before their eyes. The cold stone arouses from its slumber and seems to tremble, as if shaken by some pain which slowly yields to blissful rapture.

High above the altar hangs the figure of the Savior, whose pain-torn body is bleeding its life out on the cross. A greenish yellow light pours from the window to shimmer strangely on that pale face in which the anguish of the soul is mirrored.

The eyes, about to close in death, are raised on high in one last supplicating glance, as if there they sought release from their deep agony. A red sweat bedews his forehead, oozing slowly from the red, red wounds, where the sharp thorns of his crown have pierced.

In his glance all the pains are fused that have e'er been suffered in this vale of tears and thrust their thorns deep into the hearts of men.

The pale body, shivering with the frosts of death, struggles in silent torture toward eternity, and over it falls softly the shadow of death.

To the right of the altar stands an image of the Madonna, her mild eyes gazing tenderly earthward. Her left hand bears a palm-branch, the right is stretched forth in blessing, as if she would shed pity over all who suffer.

A young monk kneels before the figure of the Virgin and bows his head almost to the earth, as if the heavy load of sin would crush him. His breast is shaken by deep sobs. His words fall dull and heavy from his lips and shape themselves into an urgent, passionate prayer:

Oh, Mary, merciful Mother of God! My soul cries out to you in anguish, my wounds bleed before you! Have pity on the wretch who kneels here, heavy-laden at your holy feet, and send me release from my pain!

When I entered these quiet walls to devote my soul to God's work, the great peace came over me for which my heart had yearned so long. I could hear within my breast the sound of harps, and my soul floated in a bright splendor that bore it toward eternity.

Oh, the peace was heavenly that came to me and sank into my soul like healing balsam, gave me to know the glory of God.

My spirit submerged itself in God's work. Out of a thousand fountains the floods of his wisdom poured out for me. I felt his breath in every grain of dust, and a very blade that nodded in the field filled me with a blessed rapture, revealed to me the Creator's greatness. His spirit spoke to me from every bud. I heard his voice in the thunderpeal, I saw his power in the lightning and the storm.

When night sank down on earth and sea, and high in heaven a thousand stars came out, then I felt the Creator's holy presence close at hand. The whole world seemed to me a book filled with the wisdom of his works.

When I sat of evenings silent in my cell, my spirit deep immersed in God's holy word, I felt myself illumined within, I knew his spirit was burning in my soul, and my tongue, which had been bound, was then released.

I listened to his word with deepest reverence, keenly aware how much it stirred me. His creative will danced in my blood, and within me something struggled up out of the depths and sought to find form and expression.

But my world was suddenly shattered. Everything appears to me in two forms. Within my soul dark powers rage, disturbing my mood of pious reverence, turning my thoughts into forbidden paths, and robbing me of my peace of heart.

When my soul is filled with pious devotion, feels itself possessed by the Holy Ghost, suddenly quite other figures dance before my senses, pointing out to me the portals of a world my eyes had never seen before.

Scarlet sin stands before me clad in purple and woos my body with her tricky lusts. I feel the hot breath of her passion, and the blood flows swifter through my veins. My heart beats wildly in my breast, fiery passion envelopes me. My breath stops; my eyes grow red, my soul pants with fierce desire.

The air within my cell grows sultry, heavy and dead, and sweet sounds ring in my wakeful ear, infatuating, filled with fire, and sinfully beautiful. The flames of sin glow from a thousand craters and pour like streams of fire into my heart, that quivers shamelessly with joys undreamed of.

Then it fades away, as in a dream, and the world lies bare and sober again before my gaze. But my limbs are heavy as lead. My head feels empty, as after a night of carousing, and ideas come back but slowly. And they are still misty and obscure, knotting themselves within my brain like a tangled skein. Slowly the recollection fades, and all the difficulties vanish in the depths.

Then once again I feel God's spirit in my breast, my eye sees heaven open once more, and the chorus of the angels falls softly on my ear. Suddenly my heart feels as light of wing, rejoicing in God's glory, as a lark soaring up to heaven. The reason of all things seems clear to me again. My mind revels once more in the Holy Book, seeking for strength to defy the tempter's cunning.

But just when my spirit, filled with joy supreme, intoxicated with God's holy things, is lifted up to burning ecstasy, then there falls a shadow on my heart, and everything clothes itself in new garments.

It is as if serpents crept along the lines, and every word takes on a different meaning. A revelation of gloom comes over me. I can no longer ward off the powers of darkness that out of hidden depths force their way into my soul, ensnare my spirit in magic threads.

If in my torment I gaze upon the crucifix that hangs in anguished grandeur above my cot, I see a specter grinning at me that has just found its way there from the depths of hell.

Out of every holy image devil's faces laugh, out of every corner hell rushes at me. Demons circle round me in wild dances until my mind seems like to fail.

Then, all at once, the picture changes. I hear gentle voices urging, creeping softly into my mind and tempting me caressingly to forbidden deeds. The sweet scent of roses fills my cell, and my blood courses warmer through my limbs. Confused voices find their way up from the depths, the stout walls shake as if in pain.

Then the saints shed their garments, and flaunt, lasciviously, their naked flesh. Then foaming floods burst from the depths; the whole world seethes with voluptuous desire. Now my cell becomes the Venusberg, and lechery flaunts wantonly before my eyes.

And then I summon my remaining strength and wish to cry to God in my great need. But only gruesome curses issue from my lips and ring horribly through the silent halls.

Every image whirls in dizzy circles until at last my madness knows no bounds. I tremble before my own ego, which seems as strange and unfathomable to me as if it had never belonged to me.

My thoughts tumble in wild chaos, then all go whirling off in crazy circles. There is no longer any up or down; until the dam bursts at last before this surging flood of madness.

Good and evil whirl in a wild maelstrom; virtue mates unashamed with vice, and where I expected God, the devil's face grins at me. Where is the firmament that parts the waters, that separates the Kingdom of God from that of Satan.

I, myself, have lost my hold on everything and feel myself torn along by the whirlpool that is sweeping me toward a shoreless sea — a straw dancing on the flood, all unsuspecting of the depths that yawn below.

In my brain things are tossing up and down. Sin wears the modest garb of virtue. Lady Venus boldly takes the Savior in her arms. God and the devil waltz together in a dance for which the saints twang the lyre.

I wander, lost, in my own heart, and feel as if two souls dwelt in me. One pulls me up toward heavenly heights, the other, at the same time, pushes me down to hell.

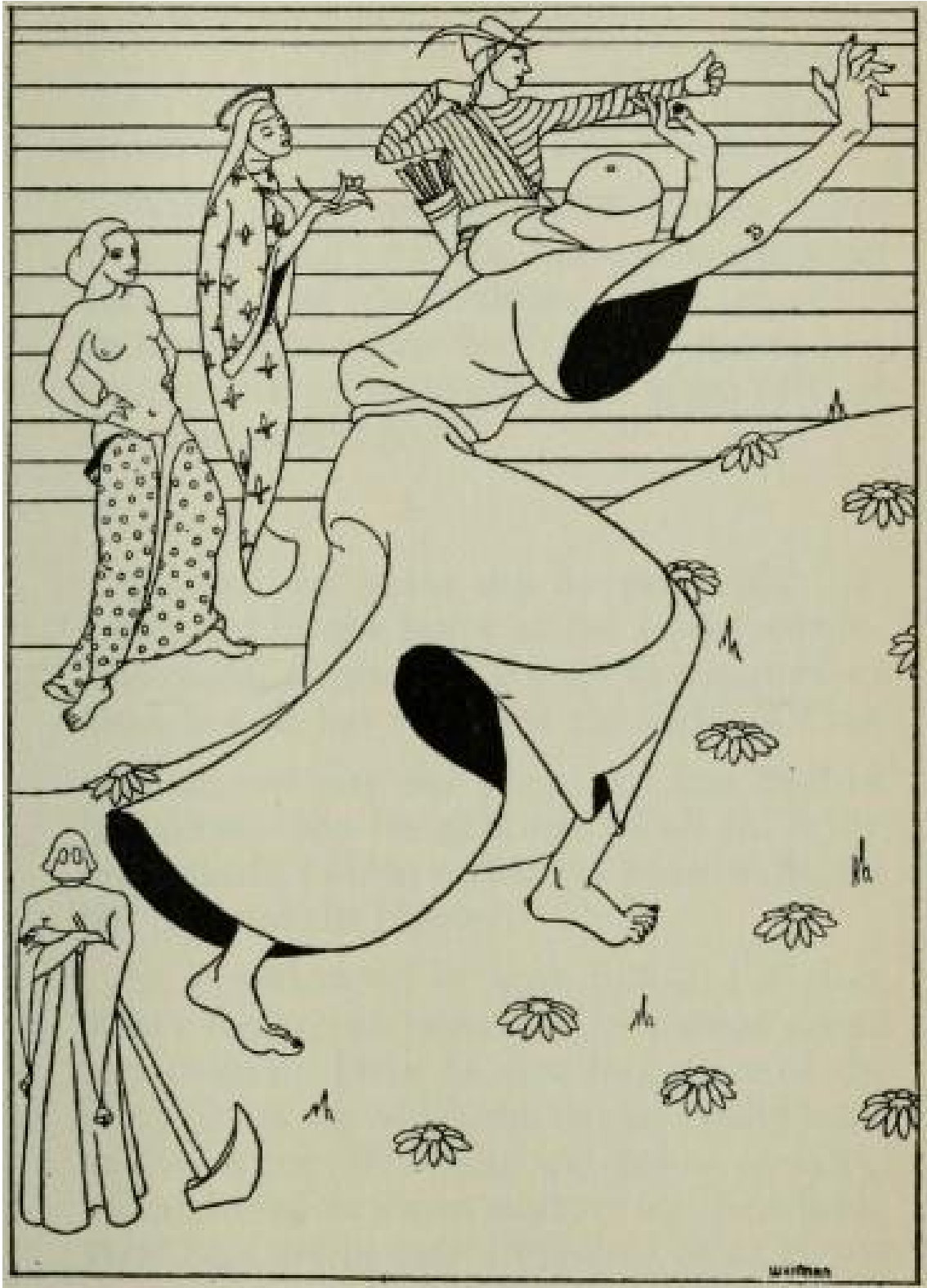
Mary! Merciful Mother of God! Hear me, and the anguish of my soul! Give me back my peace of heart! Cleanse me of the sweet poison of sin! Let my soul once more raise itself on high and sun itself in the splendor of God's glory!

Gone is the window's many-colored light; the church is veiled in darkness; only on the image of The Virgin does a faint glow still shimmer.

Now the monk in anguish raises himself erect and stretches out his arms in supplication. The young face is contorted by affliction; his eye tries to catch the gaze of the Lady of Mercy, to see if she is showing pity for his distress.

Suddenly a mysterious life shines from the image. The eyes glow with a gentle splendor, and her right hand is lowered tenderly in blessing.

Saved! The jubilant word slips from his lips. His dark eyes look as if illumined, and all the numbness slips from his soul. The narrow walls, the world and its affairs vanish. He feels himself encircled by a shining glory and hears the quiet breathing of eternity.



In the cloister life runs its course. No discordant note disturbs the peace that dwells here and suffuses the hearts of the placid brotherhood. The young monk feels as if endowed with new life. Gone is the spell which has rested on him, dragging his soul down into the depths. Vanished is the glamor which has so often set fire to his senses.

With pious zeal he gives himself completely to God's service, and none compares with him for cheerfulness. The band of brethren have taken him to their hearts and timidly look up to him, for the grace of God is visible about him.

And so the years slip by peacefully, uninfluenced by the hurry of the world outside. The monk, submerged always in the word of God, has all but forgotten the flight of time.

Then one day the prior tells him that he has chosen him for guardian of all the treasures which, hidden within its stout walls, are the pride of the cloister.

In serious mood he leads him to the place where the sacred relics rest in ancient chests and coffers. Here he sees fragments of the Holy Cross, on which the Savior's body hung in the agony of death, and bones of saints who rejoiced to die as martyrs for their faith. And here are heaped a hundred other things fitted to stir the hearts of the faithful and to open their minds to the miracle.

After the prior has shown the monk the treasures that lie hidden in the cloister and has explained to him the sacred power that these dead things possess and exert, he leads him on to an ancient coffer which rests in a niche half-hidden by the shadows.

In this coffer, the prior tells him solemnly, there lies an elixir of life, that was brewed in hell by Satan himself. It had been intended for Saint Anthony, for whom the evil one had once wished to lay a snare. But God's grace watched over him, and after the saint's death, the phial found its way to us.

My son, this flask too is in your charge. Take care, then, that no human hand shall ever touch it in blasphemous desire. The man in whose veins this devil's brew ferments is given over to the powers of darkness, lost for time and for eternity.

Silently the old man turns the ancient lock and takes from the coffer a richly ornamented casket, in whose soft-lined depths reposes the tiny phial. As the prior opens the casket there spreads through the room a faint perfume, that works intoxicatingly on mind and sense.

The young man does not know what is happening to him. His gaze seems to be held spell-bound on the phial, which the old man now puts back, hastily hides once more in the coffer. Furtively he drinks in the sweet fragrance which still pervades the ancient chamber. Has he not felt this same intoxication before this? Where was it, now, this fragrance once before bewildered his senses?

And then a faint presentiment takes hold upon him. This is the fragrance that once filled his cell, that scent of roses that came of nights and so infatuated him.

He hears the old man's words as in a dream; soft voices are ringing in his ear. Then the heavy door is closed behind him. The spell that had laid hold on him is gone. With hasty hand he seizes

on the key and hides it in the folds of his coarse garment.

The day goes by as usual. But when at night he sits in his cell, his mind buried in God's holy word, again he feels that subtle fragrance steal caressingly over his senses. Is it but the roses out there in the garden, whose odor creeps in through the open window?

The old book lies upon his table, with the pale light of his lamp upon it. In vain he tries to grasp the meaning of the words, for that fragrance steals away his peace of heart. He feels that something strange envelopes him, and subtle threads enmesh his soul.

Then he sees a pale shadow on the wall, which bends down toward his book. When, startled, he looks about his narrow room, a voice speaks distinctly:

Why do you wait? The key is in your hand. Drink of the wine that fills that flask.
Then will your nature stand unveiled to your mind, and magic powers will permeate
your body. Your spirit will soar over strange lands, and its pinions will grow strong.

He falls upon his knees before the cross. Out of the depths of his soul pours forth his prayer for deliverance in this, his hour of need:

O Jesus, be thou gracious unto this poor sinner and guard my soul from this new
anguish! Defend me against that strange power, which with vile cunning seeks to
enmesh my soul and to deliver me to the horrors of hell!

Thus he prays in anguish throughout the night, racking his body with imagined torments, until exhaustion closes his eyes.

When daylight comes, it all seems like a dream, but when the second night descends, the same hideous dream begins again. Through the open window drifts a sweet fragrance, and soon the same voice tempts him:

You fool, do not delay an instant! Fate has put into your hand what has never before
been granted to a mortal. Let not the hour go by unused. What you are neglecting
all eternity will not bring again!

And thus the voice pleads with him softly every night. He feels his strength slowly going from him. And on the seventh night he ceases to resist. It calls him from his room in frantic haste. Panting, he rushes through the corridors to the spot where Fate awaits him.

With hasty hand he opens the narrow door. He sets his lamp on the old coffer, and clasps both hands above his heart, which is throbbing painfully in his breast. In feverish madness he throws back the lid and reaches in his hand for that rare treasure which has robbed him of his peace of mind.

His whole body is shaken as by a chill; he feels as if his blood stood still. And then he holds the phial in his hand. A sweet fragrance envelops him. Trembling in every limb he withdraws the stopper and watches the blue sparks spray from its mouth. Quickly he sets the phial to his lips and eagerly gulps down the sweet draft, which seems to sweep like fire through his veins.

And then from a great distance there rings in his ear:

Now all is over! Lost through your own sin!

In wild haste he hides the phial in its casket and rushes with hurried steps out of the room.

The old church glitters proudly with the pomp of lights, the deep organ peal fills the sacred place, where the brotherhood has gathered to receive God's benediction. The deep tone echoes through the hearts of men, freeing them from the troubles of this world and leading their spirits up to glorious heights.

Then the flood of sound ebbs slowly, and the last note at length dies out. Out of the solemn silence that falls on the room the young monk ascends to the chancel. His pale countenance looks as if carved in stone, each line shaped by an artist hand. But out of the dark eyes streams a red light like the glow of some inner fire.

He stands and looks at them in silence, as if he wished to enthrall with his mere gaze the men who are there before him. His eyes bore deep into each heart; each shudders slightly beneath this gaze that seems to be searching into his very soul.

And then his voice pours forth like the deep tones of a bell, and every word falls on the ear like a caress. It is a strange language that he speaks, in which every word seems to take on a hidden meaning. His sentences glitter with a many-colored splendor and build themselves into a fairy structure of undreamed-of pomp and glory.

Ideas shoot up like rockets and split, crackling, into a thousand sparks, to fall like a shower of stars. Every word has a life of its own and dances with the others in a lively whirl to produce bright symphonies. Then the words soar up again in a new array and dance and glitter in the fire of his thought.

The church is filled with a delicate fragrance, that falls like a narcotic on the senses and wakes strange feelings from the depths.

The pious band sits as if enthralled, spellbound by every word that issues from the young monk's lips and flutters gently away in space.

He himself is tense with astonishment, overpowered by the splendor of his own speech. His own words strike upon his ear as if uttered by some other tongue. He feels as if caught in a dream, and questions the reality of the things about him.

Who is speaking here? he asks in his mind. It is not I—another is speaking from me. I have never thought about these things. I stand bewildered before my own work, feel that another shaped it.

Then his voice rises to its loftiest strain and pours in rolling fullness through the room, stirring things undreamed of in the souls that listen. Then one last cry from the depths of his soul, one last sigh, soft and illusory; and he is silent, the last note dies out.

The band of the faithful sits as if entranced, still gazing at the same place, when the monk has long since left the chancel.

He does not know himself what has come over him. That strange voice still is ringing in his ear; the words still group themselves in proud array; his thoughts are still involved in that subtle fragrance. It is the same fragrance that issued from the phial which he pressed to his lips that night. Now it is in his every word, and sparkles, blue, in his ideas.

Lost to the times; but bearer of his own world!

The news resounds through town and village that a new prophet has arisen in the land. The old church scarce can hold the throngs that pour in now from every quarter to hear God's word from his lips.

Every mouth is filled with his praises. He seizes men's hearts on the wing and leads them to a new kingdom.

Only the prior he does not move. The fire of his eloquence leaves that man's mind unstirred. He suspects that a frightful thing has happened here and prays to God that light may come to him, so that he may halt the danger that threatens the holy place as does Satan's cunning.

And one day he summons the brother to him and speaks to him with troubled gaze:

My son, the evil one has laid hold on your heart to estrange you from the spirit of the Lord. To me, too, your words seem a miracle, but it is not God's voice I hear speak through you. It is Satan's cunning that has freed your tongue. The power of darkness has ensnared you, and ever deeper yawns the pit toward which you're lured.

Already the tempter has duped you too completely for my weak word to be of help. Only God can help you; may He have mercy on your soul. Your fate lies in his strong hand. Only He can rescue you from the curse that is upon you, release your heart from Satan's wiles.

Your discourse has intoxicated the unthinking, but it works like a vile scandal in this place. It disturbs the peace that has always had its dwelling here and instills the poison of sin among us. Therefore you can no longer stay here.

Salvation can come for you only from without. Still I have not lost all hope. Turn now your steps toward Rome to fulfill a secret charge, which by the will of God I now place in your hands.

Seize the opportunity I offer you to find your path back into the way of God. And when penitence has cleansed your heart, come back once more within these walls, where a father's heart beats for you.

My heart goes with you on your way. May the blessing of the Lord be over you! Now, get ready for your distant goal; for tomorrow, e'er the sunrise, these gates must close behind you.

The red glow of the sun begins to show in the east, and the soft twilight that has wrapt things in a veil like slumber, slowly fades away. The grassblades are covered with fresh dew, and a joyous twitter comes from every twig. Flowers are waving by the brookside, and a millwheel clatters gaily. How beautiful the world is in its splendor!

The young man goes lustily on his way, enraptured he drinks in all the splendor that is spread before his gaze. The cloister's walls lie far behind, and the distance stretches open before him. Fast-bound, back there, lie all the trifles that have shut in his mind like prison walls and have dipped the wings of his flaming spirit. Now at last he can spread his pinions freely and soar in space like an eagle, enraptured of his own strength.

It seems to him that already years have gone by since he left the cloister behind him. A veil has fallen over the past: What has been seems wrapt in mist, and only with difficulty can he recall that time which once he lived through.

For weeks he has thus pursued his course, when, all at once, he finds himself surrounded by dense woods. The day is drawing to its close, and he still sees no goal in sight, so at last he leaves the narrow path and, abandoning himself to blind chance, painfully forces his way through the thickets.

And then a chasm halts his steps. The ancient trees stand close together and lift their stems high aloft so that only a faint light sifts through.

From a tall cliff a torrent plunges into the abyss, dashing itself to foam on jagged points. The ground is covered with soft moss, and many-colored fungi grow in circles all about. It seems to him like a fairy landscape. He feels a deep longing in his breast, and gazes dreamily into the chasm.

Then he sees a man in huntsman's garb stretched out close beside the pit, sleeping, carefree, in the green twilight.

He casts a searching glance at the sleeper's face and feels a strange foreboding in his heart. It is as if he had seen that countenance before. He stands and thinks, but the effort is vain, and then into his brain there glides a thought:

What if I, now, were this huntsman? It seems to me I have more the talent of a huntsman than of a cloister brother.

But almost before this thought is complete he feels his heart beat faster. Some hellish magic rages through his blood; his eyes gleam with passion, and red shadows rise from out the depths:

Some power from without seizes his arm. He gives the sleeper a savage shove so that he plunges from the cliff into the chasm. A muffled shriek sounds from the pit, then a vast silence overspreads the scene, as if it all had been a dream.

With puzzled gaze he stares down into the abyss, still not knowing what has come over him. Then he hears a sprightly laugh, and a cheerful voice addresses him:

A monk's robe becomes you perfectly. In that costume you would fool the devil himself. Congratulations on a bold deed, noble sir! Let's hope your sweetheart does not turn suspicious!

Still half dreaming he turns his head and sees opposite him a fellow who looks like an unemployed page. But he is fairly doubled up with laughter, water is streaming from his eyes, and he is gasping as if the evil one were in him.

A monk! A monk, just like you see in a book! As if he had just escaped from the cloister. It's just too funny! The prettiest trick you've ever played! But it's time now to stir our stumps, for it's a good piece to the castle.

The monk does not understand a word the other speaks, but he smiles as if it were all perfectly clear. Everything is turning over and over in his brain; his thoughts dance in weird confusion, and all reality has vanished.

The sun stands red on the horizon, when having reached the edge of the forest, they catch sight of a fortress perched on a steep height and looking down into a picturesque valley.

And now it's time for me to excuse myself politely, says the page with a sly wink. For if people should see us together, your cowl wouldn't be of much help. Farewell! And success to your wickedness!

While the page vanishes into the forest, the monk climbs the steep path to the castle gate. The lord of the castle receives him with as earnest a greeting as if he had long been yearning for his arrival.

He speaks of his son, whose mind is clouded, and deep sorrow struggles for expression. Fate has dealt harshly with him, but he has not yet lost hope and thinks the monk is bringing release from his distress, and with God's help will clear the darkness from his child's mind.

While the count is revealing his trouble to the monk, the countess searches him with burning glances that set the blood racing like fire through his veins.

And when night has veiled the castle in darkness and all have betaken themselves to rest, the countess appears in the monk's chamber and embraces him with wild passion. He feels her devouring, burning, kisses, that fairly draw the blood out of his heart.

Satan himself dwells in this woman, who raves and moans in unsated passion. Her naked body quivers with a feverish heat. She tears at his body in insane lust and chokes as if she were dying of desire.

Then he himself feels a fierce heat in his brain. Red madness rages in his blood. He sees the sin that glitters in her eyes and hears the hissing whisper of her lips:

The highest bliss is wickedness. That you have come to me here in the guise of a monk, heightens the pleasure to trembling ecstasy.

Thus speeds the night in fierce, sinful pleasure. The first gray of dawn shows pale in the east; she tears herself, staggering, from his arms, lest some spying eye should glimpse her.

The days slip by as in a dream, with every night the same mad rapture. The bold duplicity at first delights the monk, then he begins to feel those boundaries slowly fading behind which hitherto his ego had seemed held. Secret horror awakens in his breast, and cold fear lays hold upon his heart, when his own image stares at him.

Who am I? he inquires with a puzzled look. Am I the monk who revels here in sin? Am I the huntsman who lies rotting in the abyss? A second self springs up before my eyes and takes charge of the body of the monk with which to give itself over to the intoxication of sin. Hardly does the one stand out clear before my mind, till it suddenly takes on the form of the other. Then the two go round and round in wild succession, until all differences vanish in the swirl.

I feel myself grow dizzy and can no more tell up from down. Every day the monk grows more and more a stranger to me, but still he drags my mind along with him and holds me with a thousand iron chains.

I can't bear this condition longer, I must again be certain who I am, so that I can separate my own woes from a stranger's sins.

But wait! It's slowly getting clear to me. It is the woman who has befooled me and introduced me to that silly specter. My own ego perishes in her passion—a bit of wax in the heat of an oven.

There creeps a thought into his brain:

She spins you round and round in a crazy circle until your senses slowly leave you.
If you want to know who you really are, you must first crush the serpent's head.

Then something red as blood comes before his eyes. In his veins pulses the lust for murder. Now he knows who it is that has cast a cloud over his mind.

And in the night, while they are in the drunkenness of love, he grips his talons into the woman's throat, till she lies dead, throttled, on his bed.

Then he shouts wildly into the silent night, and it echoes horribly along the empty corridors — Murder! Murder! It rings gruesomely through the castle. But while all are still impotent from fright, the murderer quickly gains the castle gates, and swiftly vanishes into the forest.

Now he goes about the world in layman's garb: the rough cowled robe lies hidden in the forest. And gradually it seems to him that with the new garb he has taken on a new soul. But even the new soul does not bring him peace.

When he strangled the woman that night, he thought he had conquered the enemy who had once cleft his soul in twain. But the murder has not banished the dark forces, and day by day his own self grows stranger to him, though he vainly seeks to fathom it.

When, after a while, abandoned by all the world, he tosses restless in his bed, and tries to follow the thoughts that flutter through his mind, he often feels the dread proximity of madness.

Where is my ego? he keeps asking himself. Who will help me to measure the depths of my being? The chambers of my mind seem to me like the close-barred cells of a prison. In every cell there dwells an insane specter; ghosts carry on there their shy existence and there in silence nourish ponderous, gloomy thoughts, that surge up ominously from the depths.

And after they have grown to ripeness in the quiet cell, in lascivious lust have shaped themselves into concepts, then some dark power opens wide the door. Now they rush, red-eyed, howling through the corridors; their breath inflames the mind to fever heat. They dance, they roar, they beat upon the walls; and in between I hear the soft clink of chains, as if madness were turning in its shackles.

Where is my ego? Who will solve that riddle for me? The sages have talked much about our nature and have given us the saying: Know thyself! But their wisdom wears the cap and bells, is folly dressed in serious garb, empty-headed fraud, not worth a fig.

Know thyself! But where shall I begin? Scarcely do I begin to think that I understand my ego, when it shatters in my hand like glass. And every fragment goes dancing round me in cruel mockery, thrusting out its pointed tongue at me.

Often it seems to me my ego hides behind a mask. But when, in wanton madness, I seek to tear the false face off, a new mask grins impudently at me underneath. I snatch and tear till I am out of breath, but when at last I get my grasp on the last mask, I find that it has grown fast to the flesh.

And if I should tear the face itself to bits, I'd merely find another mask.

Even in others I see always my own image, figures escaped from the recesses of my brain, now playing their bold game with my senses.

The subtlest logic cannot grasp the phantom, for logic is but the shadow of the out-sides of things and cannot delve into their inner nature.

Self-knowledge is the root of understanding—how often have I heard the ancient fable! Who understands himself is master of his fate! Easy said, but just an empty phrase. I hear the scornful tinkle of the bells and see the jester seriously reading his foolish sayings before the pulpit. The ear grows accustomed to the sound, and when one once is used to anything, its nonsense turns to solemn truth.

My poor ego, you eternal shadow! Even you are just a phantom doing violence to reason. An ignis fatuus, dancing over swamps, luring me, and leading me into the depths.

Then his course leads him to a city which has a strange charm for him, the restless. It seizes on his heart through some remote association, as if in some way he were bound to this place by ties of which his mind is unaware.

Chance guides him to the prince's court, and there he seeks distraction from his torment. A young beauty catches his eye, who wakens glimmering recollections in him.

He sees once more the little cloister church, sees the picture of Saint Rosalie, which so often held him spellbound. The image used to seem to him to be alive. In the sultry night, when his senses were aflame, the saint seemed to him like Venus casting chains of roses round him.

Now Rosalie appears in flesh and blood, as he had seen her in the picture. A feverish glow burns in his heart, and every mysterious fiber of his being draws him toward her.

And his desire meets with prompt response. The fair one carries his picture in her breast, and love's chains are being gently forged. Love transports him to heaven. Vanished is the deep affliction of his soul, and every load is lifted from his breast. The whole world seems to him as if transfigured; a new sun rises, beaming for him.

The months fly past: the wedding day is near. He has long forgotten the vows that once had bound him to the cloister, and which no woman's love can unbind.

He meets the bride in the old princely castle, where she is waiting for him with eager longing.

But suddenly a noise is heard outside in the street, as if a heavy coach approached the castle. The noble pair, in curiosity, step out upon the balcony. There they behold the hangman's cart before the house; with chains firm welded on him a monk lies stretched upon it. Before him in his red robes stands the executioner, as if to take him to the gallows.

When, now, the monk beholds the bridegroom, his face is twisted into a devil's mask. From his black eyes there glows the fire of madness, hoarsely he croaks from his parched lips:

Come, little brother, come down from that balcony! Hi-hi! The hangman's calling you to his grim game! And who strikes the other down, he shall be king, and from a golden goblet quaff deep drafts of blood!

The horror of hell comes over him; madness grips at his dead heart. Before his eyes he sees a sea of blood, sees red hands reaching for him from the depths. He plunges a dagger into his loved one's heart, throws himself in one bound from the balcony, and clears a path to the hangman's cart. The hangman falls, stricken with cold steel: then he quickly breaks the chains that hold the monk. With one leap he is clear of the cart and running, and the shadows of the forest receive him.

There he sinks exhausted on the earth and lies as if stricken dead.

And then a spectral form springs on him, and a voice hisses in his ear:

Now I shall be with you always, your other ego! You will never free yourself from me! I shall live your days. shall dream your dreams, and, sometime, I shall die your death!...

Then, painfully, he straightens up his weary body and slowly strides off on his long road through distant lands, over distant seas, until, one day, the last frontier beckons ...

* * *

The heaven is gray. The desert yawns.

A mighty sphinx of smooth black marble lies outstretched upon the waste of fine brown sand, her gaze lost in dreary, infinite remoteness.

Nor hate nor love dwells in that gaze: her eyes are misted. as by some deep dream, and over her dumb lips' cold pride there hovers, gently smiling, just eternal silence.

The fifth wanderer gazes into the eyes of the sphinx, but he can never solve her riddle; wordless he sinks on the desert sands.

VI The Sixth Road

NO ONE knows whence he came. He himself would probably find it hard to say. Often he feels a strange in-tuition that he stems from some fairyland, glimpsed by twilight in the blue distance and waking a dumb longing in his soul.

Before his eyes is spread the poet's world, a dreamy, sea-encircled shore, where blue wonders hide in thousands, and whose gates are opened only to believers.

A kingdom of the mind it is that beckons to him. There Fable sits upon a throne of flowers, spinning mystic threads throughout the All. A gentle tinkling fills the pleasant air, awakening dreamy longings in the breast and floating softly on to rouse delightful echoes.

In that kingdom all the bars are missing that elsewhere divide creatures from each other. Even the stones have words: the brook speaks, and the flowers and the stars. In everything a bright spirit dwells which joyously reveals itself to man and unveils to him the vast unison of the All. The fragrance of the rose is akin to the star, the wind's blast to the lily's splendor. The All is mirrored in its every part, and from the whole the part shines back again. The *I* of man finds itself in the great *We* once more, and from the *We* develops its own strength.

Death is banished from that land; one finds there only coming and departure, a sweet separation, a sure reunion. The spirit that dwells in the things works in every stone and finds an echo in every breast.

In deep caverns crystals sparkle in a sea of many-colored splendor, darting their rays into the souls of their beholders, waking in the hearts of men a mystic glow, which, in turn, is strangely mirrored in their minds and makes them see all things as if transfigured.

Thoughts here are like the crystals and shine with clear luster, undimmed by obscuring clouds. On the fairy blossoms ideas sway like bright butterflies, which, drunk with the fragrance, sip new delights from all the thousand chalices.

Out of dreams reality is born, and scarce arrived at life, itself begets new dreams, so that forever dream and truth combine in deep and intimate interfusion.

But only the poet dwells within this kingdom, which is foreign to all the other sons of earth, bound as they are by the petty requirements of the hour, forced to devote their minds to everyday tasks under the harsh yoke of duty which has been set upon them.

But when the poet knocks at the portal of the soul, reality dissolves its spell. Hidden harps begin to sound, and rouse soft echoes in the hearts of men. A mystic yearning surges up, and from the depths there comes a distant song.

He has beheld that kingdom in his dreams. The dream has now become reality, and beckons to him like a distant homeland. He sees the pain, the silent suffering of men, sees how joylessly

their lives slip by, sees how the generations sink into the grave burdened with sorrow and with grief-filled hearts that have ne'er been kissed by a beam from the infinite.

For on the earth rule worry, war, and death. Pain is our heritage from long-dead ancestors, and, on the brink of the grave, we pass it on to others, so that they, burdened with the same yoke, may struggle further along the same road, which leads out of the mist into the fog.

The profound sadness of life grips him as he beholds the lot of the sons of earth, the gray monotony of their everyday misery, into which there rarely creeps a ray from the poet's distant land, to tell men of a world of brightness, to stir their longing for the new kingdom.

He is in every way the very picture of charm. His blond hair encircles a noble brow; from his blue eyes there beams the glow of love and silent longing, eager for miracles.

Always his mind is bent on others; he is never tormented by thoughts about himself. He would embrace the whole world in his love, to lighten the sorrows, to soften the pains of others, which find an echo deep within his soul, as if they had sprung from his own distress.

He is a singer by the grace of God, and when the song pours from his lips, all pain and every earthly woe take flight. Men are spellbound by the tones, which sweep through their hearts like distant greetings from a realm not yet in sight.

A new kingdom! The poet bears it in his bosom as the promise of a far-off time, filling his soul with a sweet rapture.

Out of his song there peals the roar of the sea, the fragrance of flowers, and the beam of stars; there sounds the blue of heaven, the splendor of the sun, and the dainty dance of elves by moonlight, with the call of nixies from afar; magic sounds out of that paradise from which the sons of men were one time driven.

The great longing rings in his song, the enchanted call that sounds from far to put an end to all the pains of earth, to conjure in the days of hope, which shall slowly ripen to fulfillment.

And so, a singer, he travels through wide lands, a poet, who makes worlds of words. When his fingers pluck the harpstrings, and soft notes flow from his lips, then even the stones listen to his song. The birds on the boughs above are smitten silent, and bush and tree are sunk in dreams.

Where he goes, all woes vanish. He drives care from the hearts of men and banishes the griefs that well up from the depths.

And so he comes one day to a place remote, where his song is heard for the first time. All hang, enraptured, on his words. Never have they heard a singer like this one, who beguiles their hearts as in a dream, and holds them in the spell of his own yearning.

He stays long within that city's walls, and when, at last, he constrains himself to leave, a white haired old man steps before him and speaks impressively:

You are a king of poets, a singer such as the world has seldom seen. When I listen to your song, it seems as if I hear a message from some distant day in which no human sorrows will torment the world.

In your songs lives the spirit of the far away, who opens secret portals in the breast, and wakens thoughts that beckon only in our dreams, like wonders seen by moonlight.

Your heart seems compounded of a thousand tones. that lift it over earthly aim and pour into our hearts like a luminous flood.

You are like the angel who carries a lute instead of a heart in his breast, and from its strings sends forth deep tones from the realms of bliss to which we still are strangers. You are a new seer come among us, who shed a soft light in our souls and bear then toward that new kingdom of which your songs bring tidings.

But, young man, time passes swiftly, and the hour will come when your lips, which today are overflowing with sweet sounds, will be silenced by the kiss of death. Then will your song be stilled for all eternity, ended, like a cry in the night. There Will be nothing left of you except the memory that once you lived. The poet comes from a different world; his song comes to him from a realm of peace. Yonder, in the blue depths of space, veiled faintly by soft mists, lies the wonderland which is the object of our longing.

A soft brilliance hangs above the spot where a silver flame yearningly breathes its peaceful lay into the distance.

And dainty shadows swing about that flame in graceful dance and listen to the song, that song of yearning and creative dreams

Then the flame quivers in torment. A tear escapes from its pale light and falls down among the sons of earth to vivify the soul of a poet.

And so the mystery is wrought that hovers tenderly over the birth of a singer. Eternity gleams for him in that tear, he hears the faint notes of that distant song, and his budding dreams ripen to full azure splendor.

On his lips trembles now the note, the song, which the bright flame sang to him, and it sinks deep into the hearts of fellow men, like a message from the new realm.

But it was a god gave you your song. In your soul lurk magic powers, which, as yet, no creative will has freed. You could become the liberator of the world and save it from the agony of serfdom, which gnaws like a worm at our hearts.

From the gray old times mankind has traveled its road, that vanishes in the dim twilight. A long course. Quite without end is the line of those, who bearing the brand of Cain upon their brows, have dragged through the millennia like weary pilgrims who have missed their goal.

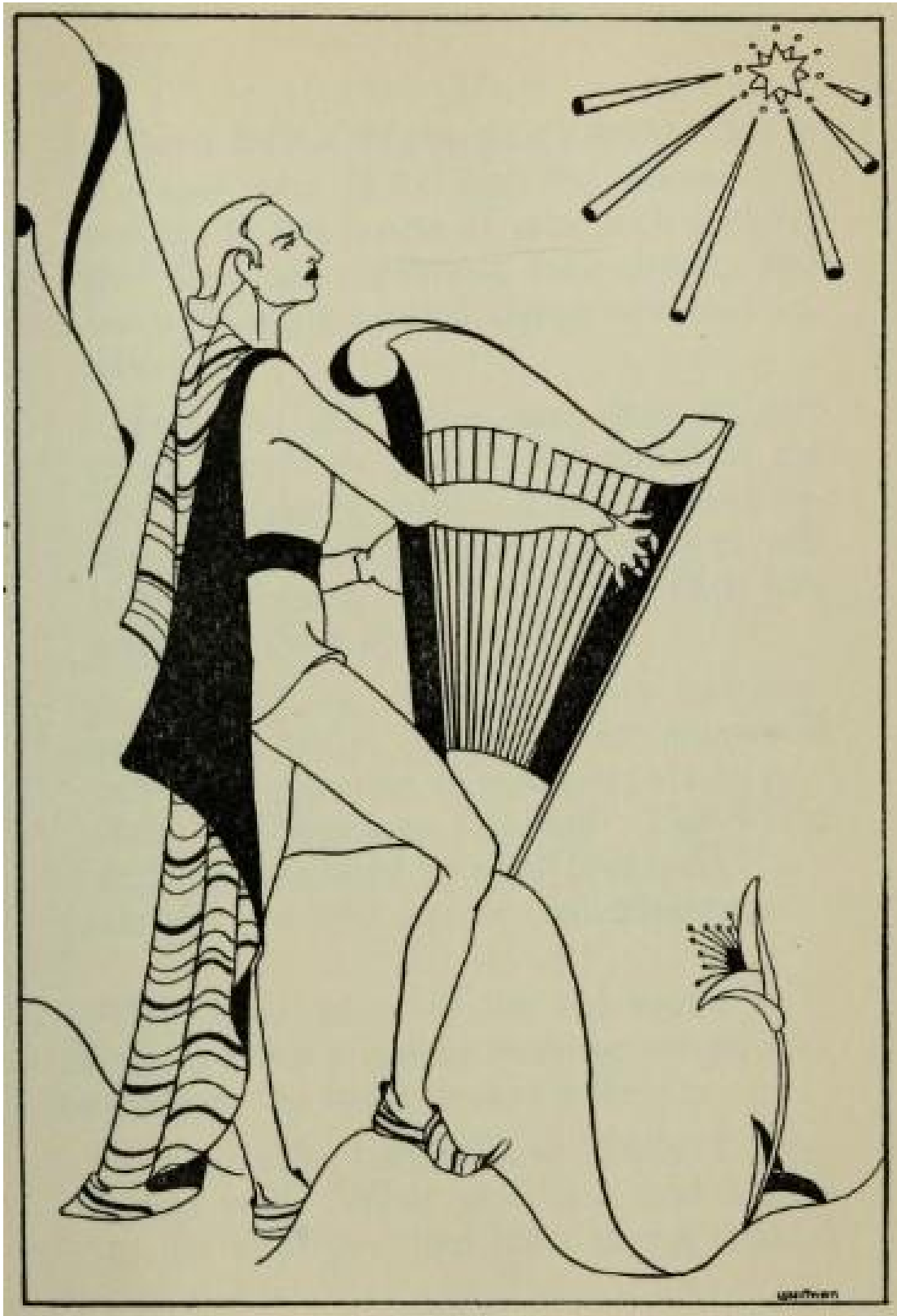
Burdened with the cruel curse of Fate, a prey to the harsh necessities of the hour, they trudge on through the fierce heat of the desert, the appalling loneliness of snow-covered fields. The full weight of the times rests on them. All that the past has brought to us they carry, though their knees may break. Then others take up the dead and heavy burden and groan painfully on through the valley of life, until they, too, must lay the burden down.

Yet there lies hidden, deep in their souls, a little spark of intense yearning, drawing them toward that peaceful, unknown realm gleaming faintly through the veil of the blue distance.

When this yearning grows too strong, the spark bursts suddenly into flame and blazes up toward heaven in savage fury. Then the structure of well-planned order breaks down, and ancient worlds totter to sudden ruin. New stars dance in the red sky, and from the depths sounds the creative fiat, shaping new worlds out of chaos and throwing bridges over chasms that bar us from the azure realm.

But slowly the flame dies out again, sinks into the abyss of things that were. Only some feeble sparks still linger, here and there, faintly aglow beneath the ashes.

Life goes on again at its old pace, and every day is once more like another. Hope dies out in the breasts of men, and Cain pants more heavily under the load that the curse of the ages has laid upon him.



And then from out the sparks flames leap up once more. Then the game begins anew; mysterious forces burst forth from the depths, and Cain tries again to find a way to that realm which he so oft has yearned for in dumb agony.

Often he struggles for it with the sword and gives his blood in fierce fraternal strife. The crops in his fields are drowned in a red sea, but no bridge leading to the other shore is found. No swelling sail speeds over this red flood, which draws every living thing down into its depths.

Then he returns to his faith in the penetrating insight of wisdom, thinks out systems, originating in reason and constructed in accordance with the rules of logic, which are to open the new kingdom for him. But thus far the results of logic have helped him not at all. What reason has so cunningly devised brings him no nearer to the great goal that he sees before him in his peaceful hours, conceivably so near, and yet such wide, wide worlds away.

But I believe in the poet's word. He is the seer who looks into the future and wakens in the hearts of men such longing that they make reality of their dreams and carry us along toward things new and remote.

Still you are but a man, born of the earth, who some day, in the course of the give and take of existence, must render his body back to earth again. Then you will be just a breath of air, a name, which will sound on through the ages.

You will, no doubt, give joy and happiness to many, but still your song will not be sung merely to men, you are to proclaim fulfillment to *mankind!* The world shall be nourished by your love, and every earthly woe and sorrow shall disappear.

The singer gazes in the old man's face, drinks in every pregnant word he utters, and, touched to the heart, makes answer:

Venerable father, how gladly I have heard you! What you have said sounds to me as if you had been saying what I was thinking. If my heart's blood could be of help to you, I should not find the sacrifice too great. My little ego would be of slight importance weighed against the liberation of all.—But I can see no dear road by which to reach that goal.

There is a way, though, to be sure, it's hard, the old man interrupts him earnestly. Seek for the key that works the miracle! Great love will show you the way.

The key? inquires the youth, as in a dream. Where in this earthly vale am I to find it? Without rest would I wander, wander, through distant lands, across wide seas, to grasp this treasure; it allures me so.

Then harken to my words! cries the old man, transfigured: In a valley, very far from here, where no man's foot, has thus far trod, there blooms a flower, calm in its azure splendor. But its chalice is not opened to the day. The pale moon is its wooer, and its beauty bathes in the light which that orb sheds.

When the moon is shining like burnished silver, and the nightingale is dying of the ecstasy of her own song, then the blue flower peeps out of the ground and uncovers to the stars its crown of petals, which are like an azure miracle. The blue flower is the magic key that will unlock for you a new future—for you and for your brethren who now walk in the dusk.

And where am I to find the wonder-flower? inquires the singer with anxious yearning.

You must seek for it, says the old man firmly. Keep going ever forward and journey through the world until you reach the vale of the blue flower. Long is the road, and many are the obstacles which lie across your path. But keep on! Never lose courage, for disappointment is the worst enemy whom you will encounter on your way.

Faith is the father of the deed. Believe in your goal, and you are halfway there. He who would bring any great work to completion in this world must carry a heart full of enthusiasm, must shrink from neither labor nor privation, and must stride resolutely into the unknown, when the old roads seem to him to lead astray.

With your heart's blood must you make smooth your path. Who would do great things must be lavish of himself and dare not chaffer with his ego. Only he whose heart is in the whole can know the strength of love or see the waving meadows of the future.

Where the ego sets up frontiers of its own and erects walls between man and man, there is your free outlook blocked. He who builds his house among mountains, shut in a narrow gorge, never beholds the world that stretches out to infinity. He sits and broods without rest or peace, searching the recesses of his own being until at last everything looks gray to him, and he loses the way to the great *We*.

Keep going, my son. The great far-away is calling. Do not heed the shadows that would fright you! Beyond the water lies the azure realm. Your stars are shining in the infinite!

I will seek it, says the singer quietly. My eyes have long beheld that valley in which the blue flower blooms. In peaceful dreams I have seen that place, and the dreams were so clear and lifelike that it seemed real to me. It seems to me as if I had beheld that valley before I wakened in this life.

Farewell, my father! The blue distance calls. Soft sounds beat upon my ear from out that vale where hides the key. Farewell! The great hour has struck!

The old man presses him to his breast and kisses him tenderly on the forehead.

Go in peace! Follow your path and stride forth boldly toward the dawn! Never look back, for what has run by with the day and now looms behind you as the past sets its fetters on the human soul and drives the mind to stupid brooding.

His song takes on a yet deeper tone, and everything that dwells within his soul pours forth with vigor unrestrained. His song is consecrated to the blue flower, and as the words flow from his lips, it seems as if there moved through every human breast a dream of that distant realm which he beholds.

A silent yearning stirs in every heart when he lays his agile fingers on the strings, and from his harp plucks melting harmonies. His song reaches the bottom of men's hearts. At its sound the last veil is dropped, and every bosom throbs in joyous accord with it.

So, without rest, he goes from place to place, through cities, hamlets, forests, desert wastes, searching for that peaceful vale that lies so crystal clear before his mind, and yet seems so distant to the view, as if it were but woven of sound and fragrance.

Year after year vanishes down the stream of time. His eye has gazed on many things, but that valley in which the blue flower displays its splendor by moonlight is still as hidden from him as the grave.

But disappointment has never roiled his mood. His eye is as clear and animated as if care had never touched him.

And so he comes one day into a strange city, filled with rich life, lively crowds of people; all having an intoxicating effect on his senses. He strides enraptured through the many ancient streets and revels in the wealth of splendor that is spread here before his eyes.

Then he sees a building, richly adorned, whose walls are blazoned by the coats of arms of many countries. A rich merchant dwells here, who has connections with all the world, and whose name he has heard before.

Will this man perhaps know of that valley for which I have thus far sought in vain? The thought suddenly darts through his brain.

He hastily opens the door that leads to the interior. A servant leads him to a room filled with the wonders of all the world. Before a table sits an old man, his gaze buried in long columns of figures, which stare back at him from a heavy volume.

The old man looks him searchingly in the face and smiles oddly when his glance touches the harp in the young singer's hand. Then he inquires his name and purpose.

What brings me to you? I hardly know myself, the youth says, blushing slightly. But I would be obliged to you for some advice. You are a man who is familiar with

all the world, and you are, no doubt, acquainted with things of which not everybody knows. Have you ever heard of the valley of the blue flower?

I have never heard of such a valley, the old man somewhat scornfully replies. But if you have business to propose, the place can probably be found. Do you wish to undertake a venture in blue flowers? I hardly think the trade would pay.

The trade? the shocked singer asks. There is no trading in the soul's welfare. Can you measure yearning by the bushel or lay blue miracles on your scales? The deepest things are eternally alien to trade. Pardon, if I have troubled you with matters which do not fit into the framework of your activities.

You are a fool! the old man barks at him. He who looks for blue miracles never gets to know the earth, it would be better for him had he never been born. He merely steals the time of busy people, who weigh things with the weights that God has given them.

You speak of deepest things, my noble bard; but folly has no depth. Look at this book, with its columns of figures! In them lies the utmost depth of wisdom. The world's course runs between debit and credit. Who steps outside that circle is lost to the responsibilities of this earth.

Leave the blue flower where it is and quit chasing after marvels that cannot be made to fit into the lives of men.

Good-by! I have no interest in dreams.

Silently he leaves the dead sea of houses and sets off through the golden sunset toward his distant goal. The old man's words are buzzing in his head. A dark shadow has fallen on his soul, and a heavy load lies on his heart.

The sun is hanging red on the horizon, when a strange traveler approaches him. His countenance is browned, his clothes are tattered. A long sword hangs from his belt, and in his right hand he bears a pike. He is a mercenary soldier, bound for the home which he has not seen for years.

The singer fixes the stranger with a kindly glance and affectionately extends his hand:

From what country do you come? he inquires cordially. Your eyes have seen many distant places. You have wandered over foreign soil and, beyond doubt, have heard of many things that have never reached the ears of those at home.

Tell me, do you know anything about a distant vale, where up to now no human foot has trod? They speak of it, perhaps, as the vale of the blue flower, which waits, dreaming, for a bard from afar for whom it is to be the key of the liberation which will put an end to all misery on earth.

The soldier fixes a hard gaze on him and darts an answer at him like a swordthrust:

I've heard of such a vale, it's true. So many fools have talked to me about it that I could wish them smitten with the plague. The valley that you ask about lies in the moon, and the flower that so charms your heart long ago withered from this earth.

You fool, why do you go chasing after unknown shadows, while fear holds the world in chains? Get you a sword, smash your lute, and face death as a slayer!

When corpses lie piled in heaps on the field of battle, and murder rages red through the villages and towns, then only can one feel the deep joy of being!

The real man's born upon the battlefield, and he takes his rights by strength of arm. For right is might, and might rests only in the sword. Only when your hands drip red with blood do you feel you have a place in this world. You are still young, as soon as age sets in the hero in us slumbers slothfully.

Profound horror grips him by the heart. With fixed eyes he stares after the figure that is slowly disappearing in the twilight. It seems to him as if murder itself has just talked with him, and that on the stranger's path his eye can glimpse a trail of red, glowing bloodily in the last gleams of sunset.

Then, hurriedly, he sets the strings of his lute astir to drive away the frightful image the stranger has planted in his mind.

His song rings clear, filled with promise, proclaiming hope, and slowly the load lifts from his soul. To his eyes again there beckon blue distances and lovely, roseate dawns.

Not where profit enchains the hearts of men, nor where the sword carves the way, can that dream blossom into life and bring remote realities to being.

Where the spirit has forgotten its lofty flight and clings timidly to the familiar clod, there the great longing has long died out.

Into that dead world there no longer drift deep, peaceful tones from out the distant realm of which the poet dreams. Now he sees clearly the profound meaning of the words with which the old man sent him on his way:

The road to the azure realm of miracles cannot be opened with the sword nor by reason's clever jugglery. The poet must discover the country of the future and in the breast of man awaken faith to act as the creative urge.

He spends long years upon the way, but nowhere does the longed-for goal appear. He wanders, wanders, over God's wide world, exploring every place with eager hope, but that vale

of which the old man spoke never reveals itself to his gaze.

His way once leads him through a mountain range such as his eye had never seen before. Profoundest solitude dwells there in every valley. No sound disturbs the still, clear air, and nowhere is there found a trace of man.

And so he strides along all through the day, until at last night wraps him in her mantle; still he has found no resting place.

And yet today his mood is one of joyous hope, some gentle intuition seems to nestle in his bosom, and his song rings out strangely in the peaceful night.

In the clear sky a thousand stars are twinkling; his mood is as mysterious and profound as if it had come to him from one of those distant worlds. Through his mind a bright dream is passing, he feels a breath from out some distant realm and divines the gladdening nearness of the great miracle.

Now the path is twisting downward into the vale, a vale just as strange and lost in dreams as he so oft has seen it in silent hours, when distant dreams enveloped him, and his soul soared to the stars.

Every stone appears to him as wonderful as if he'd known and touched it long ago. A profound yearning seizes on his heart, drawing him gently toward his home.

The whole valley gleams with a silvery radiance, and wisps of white mist waver in the moonlight like elves swinging in a dainty dance.

And then sweet sounds strike on his ear. From a nearby bush a nightingale pours her song of yearning through the silent vale. The singer stands spellbound by the melody, that vibrates softly in the pleasant night like magic sounds in a fairy tale.

And ever fuller rolls the paean through the thickets, and jubilantly the mountains hurl it back, until it ends abruptly in a trill. From the bush he hears the slight sound of a fall. It is the nightingale, who has expired, slain by the power of her own song.

A gentle rustling sounds all through the valley, and there before him the blue flower he has sought so long bathes in the moonlight. Is it a dream, that tricks his senses? The whole world seems to him bewitched., he no longer trusts his reason—but slowly his last doubts vanish—it is the valley he has so long yearned for.

His eye can scarcely comprehend the marvel that is being enacted before his gaze, immersed in the azure splendor that magically colors the pale moonlight.

Found! The jubilant cry bursts from his lips. The new realm of miracles is at hand!
The old world is perishing; the times are fulfilled!

He stoops in rapture to the earth, tenderly touches with his lips the flower's azure chalice, then folds his hands in prayer. A soft tone sweeps through the valley, like the sound of an aeolian harp touched by the wind. Away in space the stars are twinkling strangely, and heaven and earth are bending for a kiss.

Still the singer kneels in silent rapture, gazing down blissfully upon the flower, which trembles gently with his breath. And then his lute peals forth its bell-like tones, and from his lips he pours a glorious song, more beautiful than any that has e'er before sprung from his heart.

And now the miracle is everywhere at work, and plant and stone proclaim their secrets. A soft whisper runs through bush and tree, and blue sparks dance through the air. The world-soul is opening softly, as if it wished to reveal to the poet the profoundest things that lie hidden in its bosom.

Then the heaven above is rent—in radiant splendor spreads the azure realm, a fairyland, an Elysian Field, just as he so oft has dreamed it.

From far away he hears the rustling of leaves, and the soft rippling of waves beats on his ear, a gentle greeting from another world.

He lifts his arms to heaven as if he would fold all the splendor that lies spread before his gaze in his embrace. He feels the bliss of happiness, feels the joy of the liberation swelling in his soul; drawing it onward toward that new realm which is now to arise for the sons of earth to dwell in.

Then his glance seeks again for the blue flower. A new miracle is revealed to him. The wonder-chalice has spread wide, and every petal gleams in the moonlight like a sapphire cut from the blue deep. In every leaf of the bright crown he sees the reflection of the blue realm that shines down on earth from the heavens.

The singer stands before this pomp, enraptured, and sinks his gaze in silent reverence before the miracle which is being shown to him.

Once he had felt the miracle in his own breast. Out of his soul it had woven a dream into the All; now the miracle itself lives in the All, and out of the All the dream sinks into his breast.

The dream is now the reality of life. The singer now knocks at the portal of the realm which his creative word is opening to the world. The Paradise which earlier man lost, the poet finds revealed to him anew. Cain is returning to his birthplace.

Now he tenderly lays hold on the blue flower and frees its roots from the soil. The whole valley shines in azure splendor, as if transfigured by the light of the new realm, and thunderous harmonies ring through the air. In blaze and clangor a new world is born, and the gates of heaven softly close.

The singer carefully wraps up the flower and hides the treasure close beside his poet's heart. Now is the end of the pain and woe. The key is found that is to unlock the kingdom.

Around the mountains the fogs rise and spread out like a veil across the valley. The new day greets the earth with its pale light and wakes it from its dreams.

The peaks brighten in the red glow, and about the heights there plays a purple splendor that softly sinks down into the vale.

Then the singer quickly picks up his lute and strides gayly toward the new day. From his eyes a blue light beams, the faint reflection of that azure realm, which on that night had shone on him from heaven.

Now his feet have crossed the silent valley, and the mountain rises steep before his gaze. His course leads up a narrow path. The cliffs tower boldly up to heaven, and streams plunge, roaring, to the depths. No safe foothold now is found, painfully he works his way through the heaps of ruins round the feet of tumbling crags.

Often he has to climb precipitous slopes, often deep chasms yawn before him as if to bar his way. He wanders aimlessly through the maze. As soon as he has conquered one abyss, another yawns before him.

Often he sinks exhausted on a stone, because his weary limbs refuse to bear him farther, but he never stays long in one spot. A burning urge within him leaves him neither rest nor peace. The great task which awaits him drives him ever onward.

Before his mind there stands the vision of mankind eagerly looking forward to him coming. He well knows the value of each hour; the misery of the earth has endured too long already. Now the great hour is to strike for Cain, who bears the curse.

And thus he wanders through the dreary mountains until night falls silently upon him. Then he pillows his head upon a stone and watches the stars that twinkle softly overhead.

Space appears to him like a blue sea. It seems he is lying on its bottom and can hear the waves breaking far above him. A white skiff is floating on the blue flood. In it sits a singer, who sweeps his harp and follows quietly the sounds that he has caused.

When he awakes with the graying dawn, he recalls the dream that puzzled him. Then he strikes some deep notes from his own harp and listens, noting where in the distance the sound seems to lose itself. He turns his steps in that direction until he espies a path that leads down to open country.

Now the land spreads wide before his gaze. The air is clear, but the sky is gloomy and dense clouds are piled around in space. Stray drops are falling here and there, like tears from some eye far aloft.

He feels a gentle palpitation in his breast, and a mild sadness grips his heart. The whole world seems so strange to him today. Nostalgia for his kind lays hold on him, and he recalls that now for many days he has not looked into a pair of human eyes.

Then he sees houses in the distance. A tiny church surrounded by white walls, points its spire toward heaven. Now a great longing comes upon him, the longing for his brethren far away. The burning urge lends wings to his feet, and speeds his homeward steps.

But he finds no one anywhere. No sound comes to him from afar. The village is wrapped in silence as profound as if life had abruptly ceased, suddenly stricken by grim death.

Then he sees that all around the fields have been destroyed, and when he sets foot in the first street, a picture of horror is unveiled to his gaze. Devastation shows itself at every step. The doors hang loose on broken hinges; the rooms are filled with wreckage. Here and there dead bodies of men and women are to be seen, lying where they were struck down, their faces distorted by the death agony.

Life has perished everywhere. What the murderers' fury spared is now scattered far and wide, fleeing the grim wrath of death.

Profound horror lays hold on the singer, and he stands paralyzed before the picture. He feels a trembling in his limbs, and his soul quivers in dull pain.

And then he summons all his strength; he leaves the place of horror and of pain and hastens away.

Then distant sounds strike on his ear, and far off in the field he sees a swarm of people, streaming away in all directions, but moving always in strict order.

And suddenly it is clear to him what is going on. It is war that has swept into the land and now holds the people by the throat.

With hurried hand he plucks at his breast and feels the flower that lies hidden there. Then he sets off like the wind. His lofty brow is bathed with sweat, his breath pants hot from his torn breast, his foot hardly touches the ground.

He sees two armies yonder in the field, standing ready to destroy each other in grim fury. In his ears ring the clang of trumpets and harsh battle-cries from a thousand throats. He sees weapons flashing in the shifting light and banners flying in the cooling breeze.

Then in his veins he feels a giant's strength and rushes in wild haste to the battleground to call halt to red death. And before the mad turmoil starts he loudly shouts forbiddance to the fighters.

A low murmur runs through the ranks, and slowly the weapons are lowered. The mercenaries stare in silence at the stranger, feeling spellbound by his gaze. But he steps deliberately into their circle to pronounce the magic words of liberation.

Break your swords—the times are fulfilled! Murder no longer dominates the world!
The azure realm has set its portals wide. What has lain deep hidden in your bosoms
now comes forth into the light. Cain has completed his long term of suffering. A new
dawn is shining in the east!

'Twas but despair that drove you to the field and pressed the swords into your hands.
Hate had been born of love, and the golden grain was dinged with brothers' blood.

A new realm is waiting for you all. The red springs of hatred are dried up, and men
reach out their hands to men for union. A realm of freedom will now arise for you.
Justice shall prevail on earth!

What only the poet has seen in his dreams, faith has now transformed into reality.
Behold the miracle that has happened to the world! The blue flower is in my hands.
I myself have plucked it in that valley where before no mortal foot had trod. It is the
key to the new realm!

And from his bosom he draws forth the fine kerchief, unfolds it reverently to reveal the miracle to the world.

He gives a sudden moan of pain. A low cry is wrung from his breast—a note that carries in it all the misery of the ages.

The flower lies wilted in his hand, and death grins from the wonder-chalice....

Now the last fairy tale's dreamed out, the joy of all his anxious longing's dead.

With rude hands they drive him from the place, shrill cries of cruel mockery ringing in his ears. His heart beats wearily in his breast; the bard's last hope has vanished, and his soul bleeds in silent torment.

The day dies out in gray twilight, and profound darkness takes the world in its embrace. The singer has set himself upon a stone beside the road for a brief rest, and stares with troubled gaze into the night.

Then suddenly he reaches for his lute, and from its strings he draws forth all the woe that's gnawing deep into his poet's heart. Comes a shrill whir; the first string has broken.

He wanders on and on through foreign lands, drags his weary limbs from place to place, but nowhere can he find a resting place. His harp's strings are all broken now; no, one still remains in place.

Then, one day, he sees the desert. A shrill whir—the last string parts...

* * *

The heaven is gray. The desert yawns.

A mighty sphinx of smooth black marble lies outstretched upon the waste of smooth brown sand, her gaze fixed on dreary, infinite remoteness.

Nor hate nor love dwells in that gaze; her eyes are misted, as by some deep dream, and over her dumb lips' cold pride there hovers, gently smiling, just eternal silence.

The sixth wanderer gazes into the eyes of the sphinx, but he can never solve her riddle; wordless he sinks on the desert sands.

VII The Awakening

TIME rushes by in hurried flight, and year after year flows into the great ocean of eternity which stretches placidly away into the boundless distance, no longer disturbed by wishes of any kind.

And there is something brooding over time and space, watching with lifeless eyes the ancient game of life and death, becoming and perishing, that repeats itself forever in the grim cycle of events.

And still the desert yawns dread and drear, and the gray sky overhangs the dreary land, which stretches, disconsolate, off toward the far horizon, a picture of death and rigid calm.

And still the sphinx lies on the desert sand gazing dreamily into distant space; about her cold lips hovers still that enigmatic smile of profound, eternal silence, held through the millennia in its stony spell.

But on a certain night of deathly stillness the gray, sickly veil of heaven is torn asunder, and the bright light of a huge star falls, gently gleaming, on the old stone image.

The rays play caressingly over the stern brow and are reflected softly from the countenance that still glimpses grim riddles in the dread distance, as if her hour would some day come from there.

Her slender body glimmers in the pale star-gleam. A soft twilight struggles up from out the depths where six wanderers lie in the deep spell of sleep.

Then a dim glow shows on the brow of the first wanderer, a faint quiver stirs his limbs, and his heavy, sluggish, lids lift slowly.

His eyes behold the silvery gleam of the new star, sparkling oddly there above him. He lifts his head, still heavy with long dreams, sees the sphinx, lighted by the soft starlight, and tries with wandering glance to pierce the night, as if he sought to conjure up things long, long gone.

Only slowly does his memory return. From the depths of his soul there rises a faint glimmering, like a mist-wraith in the moonlight. Before his eyes stretches the long road which he once traveled through the world, the road that led into unknown countries toward a distant goal that lured his mind like a will-o'-the-wisp.

This is the desert that once swallowed him, when, long years ago, bereft of hope, he reached the end of his earthly journey.

There still rings in his ears the strange word that sank dead and heavy into his mind when he first looked into those dark, mysterious eyes gazing dreamily into the distance, first glimpsed the placid smile on those cold lips—that word which pierced into hidden depths and suddenly lamed the pinions of his soul.

It was as if the desert itself had breathed forth that word, which hung like a ball of fog in his brain and which no light of intellect could pierce. That word of the sphinx, which resounded, deep and enigmatic, through all the galleries of his mind, like the dying echo of a distant sound.

He looks about him; this is the very place, the selfsame desert that once he saw, just as the last curtain fell for him. A dry and death-infested land where every spark of life was long since quenched. But no star shed its light here then. A gray veil overspread the heavens above a dead and dreary land as if there were no friendly star beyond that blank wall, striving to brighten the dull earth.

But now he's bathed by the silvery glow of yonder orb that shines there, lonely, in the desert night. He feels the gentle twinkling of its light, its fine rays sifting deep into his soul, calling long vanished thoughts once more to life.

But how was it, then? Did he not, because his soul cried out for knowledge, set forth many years ago, after he had striven, sick with yearning, to search out the reasons for things—and had never been able to lift the curtain that hid the answer to all riddles behind its folds?

In his heart all the fears awake again that once harried him from place to place, and granted him no place on earth where he could find relief in his distress.

A wandering stranger, he traversed the world, left home and peace and faith behind him, following the false light of his star, which lured him forth into alien lands, but never quenched the fire of his yearning.

Until at last the open desert lay before him, the word of the sphinx resounded in his ear, his weary body sank to its last rest.

And now he feels that the fire is still not quenched, the same yearning swells his aged breast, and in his soul there burns the torment of old desires.

Still everything seems unlike what it had been before. A warming quiver runs through his body. It is the light of the star that is wakening new hope in him.

He springs up quickly, inspired by fresh impulse. It is as if a new revelation has come to him, a new brightness sparkles in his brain.

Then he sees a shadow close beside him. It is the second wanderer, whom the star has wakened and whose searching glance is now measuring this comrade, who like himself had once gone forth, driven out into the world by an inner fire until the desert's silent realm engulfed him.

Silently the first wanderer stares at the stranger's face, feeling the other's gaze meet his own as if it sought to bore into his soul.

Then he seizes his pale hand and speaks gently, as to a friend:

Don Juan, it is you! There's something in my heart that tells me so. The greatest miracle has happened: Don Juan and Faust together in the same place! Two forces

which have always denied each other, kept far as the poles asunder, because their lives were of such different sort.

Don Juan, I have dreamed a profound dream, a dream about you and the riddles that are hid in you. You, too, moved along strange paths, following your heart's fierce urge, leading you on over the deep buried past toward new realms that no one had yet seen.

You, too, were but a seeker of things remote, who never found contentment in his life. In your soul raged that selfsame urge that shaped itself in me into a consuming yearning.

And now you stand before me, a kindred spirit, sprung, like me, from the race of Cain, burdened, like me, with the curse of the ages. The same fire which consumes my soul burns in you too, and never lets you rest. Your soul, too, burns for knowledge and seeks out always and everywhere new wonders.

We always followed different roads, even our shadows fled one another, and if the one moved toward midnight the other at once set out toward noon.

And now we find ourselves at the same goal, we, who have shunned each other as night shuns day, who always found each other repulsive, and had no inkling of the unison of our souls.

My gaze was always fixed on the infinite. I cursed the fleetingness of existence, that seemed to veil from me all deeper things, to hold my senses always on mere surfaces, so that my mind could never penetrate into those hidden places where the answers to dark riddles lurk.

For you the earthly was the highest goal. Out of the past there came for you a picture of life which you vainly sought to make real. The urge of the flesh became for you the power of Fate, became the riddle of the universe.

What I sought in the intellect you sought in the impulse that slumbers deep in that abyss we call our soul, and that shuns the alert insight of reason. There, where in the depths dim forces range that never are expressed in words, there is the unlimited kingdom of impulse.

There works the silent urge of flesh to create, scorning all the rules of reason and all the laws that cunning understanding has devised.

What was it that drove you on from cup to cup and insatiably stirred your senses? Who kindled that fiery impulse in you, wakened that fierce glow in your heart, that raging passion for the burden of sin?

Was it merely the shallow delight of enjoyment, the weak desire for the pleasure of the moment, which leaves no trace of pain behind, just quickly fades away in space like smoke or noise?

No, what drew you, lured you always and again, was curiosity about the reason for life, the riddle that glimmers at you out of gloomy depths, with magic threads

enmeshes your mind.

What I looked for beyond time and space you sought in the warm touch of lips. The savage groan of fiercest passion, the fire of the flesh in the madness of sex, the impulse of the members that must have release, which lustily begets and breeds new life—that was for you the answer to the riddle.

You have struggled with this riddle and tried to straighten out its tangled threads, to braid together those mysterious impulses. In every moan engendered by lust, in every glance in which desire laughs, in every fever that seizes on your body, intoxicates your sense, and makes you jubilate in your pain you have sought for the faint traces which might lead you to the basis of all being.

You were a seeker, even as I was, only your eyes lit on other paths, which in the end led to this same desert, where the sphinx lies dreaming of her own deep riddle.

And then, with sudden insight, the other speaks:

I seem to have wakened from my deepest dream. Now for the first time your nature is revealed to me, the nature of Faust, which I have never been able to fathom.

Now I see clearly that we are of the same kind; that though we followed very different roads we still were led by the selfsame clue, which each interpreted in his own way.

You tried to get away from all things earthly, so that your mind, freed from every burden, might escape into a kingdom of its own, might penetrate behind the forms and show of this world and glimpse the mighty How? of things, might strip the veil from the great Why?

So your road led you first to God, that He might open his kingdom to your mind and light a torch for you in the night, by whose light you could see, deep and clear, the remotest and the closest things that are.

And when He proved deaf to all your prayers and failed to throw open for your inquiring mind the doors that hid from you the answers to your riddles, as the grave might have hid them, despair sent you off to Satan's realm to see if you might not win from him the understanding the longing for which had grown to torture.

But he, too, solved no riddles for you. What he let you see was your own being. And so you were deluded by an image and listened only to the echo of your own desires. Until at last you recognized the silly jugglery that was feeding on the very juices of your life.—And then it was too late, the desert already yawned for you.

But even though understanding never came to you, your struggle was not at all in vain. Though you yourself never saw the gleam of light in all the darkness that surrounds us, still your striving will remain a heritage for every generation yet to come, a heritage of fierce, urgent yearning out of which the kingdom of the spirit will some day come forth.

But I am bound to this world, to the transitoriness of earthly being which comes up like a cloud and vanishes as quickly; and it is as if the eye had never seen it.

What I have done dies with me. No heir weeps above my grave, for all things earthly, products of dark impulse, rot away with time and fall to dust.

And only that exalted urge will live that seeks the All, ties itself to the eternal, flees from the realm of the transitory.

And yet I feel a premonition in my breast, as if a strange new kingdom were at hand, a realm where intelligence and impulse are at one, where the transient joins hands with the everlasting. Perhaps—

I feel the same premonition in my heart. Say, brother, do you feel the light of yonder star? Does it come to you like a revelation of the fulfillment of one's profoundest dream?

It is as if scales had fallen from my eyes, and all things earthly now become for me symbols of the vast infinity that embraces all. Only when man finds in his passionate impulse the deep-hidden roots of his urge will the lusts of the flesh accord with the longings of the soul.

It is not well to dwell always in the heights. On icy peaks even the mind is frozen for lack of the warmth that flows from seething impulse. A world lies close at hand, and wonder piles on wonder there where impulsive forces work, weaving their perplexing mazes.

And now Fate's dread course is run: Faust and Don Juan clasp hands. In the intellect is mirrored the lust of the flesh, and light bursts on the dark realm of passion. As heaven is mirrored in a drop of dew, the eternal beams back from the earthly—the miracle is at hand—the times are fulfilled.

The light of the star is growing ever brighter, in the distant east the pale dawn glows.

Now the third wanderer lifts his head. His forehead shows pale in the flooding light, and in his eyes there gleams a soft splendor, as if they sought to conjure back a past that had long lain dead in the soul behind them.

He looks about him, still half-filled with his dream. And the clang of iron strikes his ear. A knight struggles upright from the desert sands and gazes at the star which, now high in the heavens, is shining on the desert.

Slowly memory returns to him, and pale shadows rise from out the depths through which his life's journey once ran its course. In his mind he sees the Northland's fog-bound reaches, and from the distance his father's voice calls like the faint echo of a dying gasp.

He sees again, now, that long road which he had followed years ago until it reached the desert's rim. A soft sound strikes upon his wakened ear—that last voice which he had heard, the sphinx asking her unanswerable riddle.

But the knight there, who can he be? What brings him to this place of death, which seems accursed by some grim god? There are many who have crossed his path, but this man he has never seen.

And yet that figure seems as familiar to him as if it had sprung from his own brain and intergrown with his own being. He thinks, but he can find no clue to help him solve the mystery of this stranger.

Then his eyes follow the other's glowing gaze, fixed on yon star, and it comes to him like an illumination.

When, long years ago, he was sinking into slumber here, his mind was overpowered by a dream, a dream oppressive, deep, tormenting. He saw the desert stretching dumb and hopeless off to the gray horizon. The dreariness around was so disconsolate that his heart turned to stone in his breast, and his soul groaned in torment.

In deadly anguish he cast his glance to see if he could glimpse some sign of hope. In vain, the desert yawned fearsome and drear, and a leaden weight lay on his soul.

And then he saw the sky above him slowly pressing down to earth. A cold horror gripped his heart, he felt the blood pound in his veins, saw strangling hands reach toward his throat.

His body groaned in anguished torment, his limbs drew up in terror's cramp, his heart was panting in his breast.

And then, upon the far horizon, he saw a shadow slowly grow out of the depths. And as the stranger approached his goal his figure had grown steadily clearer to his view. It was a knight of sorrowful aspect, who scarce could hold himself upon the jaded steed that crept feebly through the deserts's sands.

And now the heavy spell fell from him, and he seemed to feel deliverance. In his dream he had seen the knight again before him, telling of his great deeds, and dispelling the anxiety that racked his heart.

Now the image of his dream stands before his waking gaze, the same knight he had seen before; but the mournful countenance seems transfigured, as if a new light had burst upon his soul.

He springs lightly up, steps briskly to the knight, and lays his hand upon his shrunken arm.

Then the stranger looks him in the face, but shows no astonishment, as if he had long divined the other's nearness:

Welcome, Hamlet, my brother in distress! I slept and dreamed a deep, deep dream, in which your shade kept always coming back, until your nature was as familiar to me as if it had sprung from my own mind.

Blessed be the hour that struck for us when the light of yonder star released the spell that has held us chained throughout the years! Two brothers who trod roads

so far apart and came together to the self-same goal.

Then it is you, noble Don Quixote. In my deep dream you have appeared to me. when my soul was groaning in the pangs of death. You unbound the spell that held me, and bright light streamed into the night that had engulfed my soul.

Since my birth I have been striving to find light in the darkness that overspreads our path through life. But when a dead man gave me certainty and revealed to me the blazing road to truth, the knowledge lamed my power, and my hand weakened before its grim deed.

Understanding came to me, but not the courage that could move my hand to act. The worm of doubt gnawed deep into my breast, destroyed the stern compulsion of my will, and made me but a mockery of myself.

So knowledge became for me a vampire that sucked the blood out my heart, rotted the impetuous strength of life, until I became but the pale ghost of myself.

How different would my life have been had I but been inspired with a morsel of your courage! You never asked for favor from the hour, no timid doubts e'er lamed your arm, always you followed the noble impulse that bade you act.

You lived, I only dreamed; for life devoid of deeds is half a death. It is only in its deeds that the voice of the spirit really speaks.

It seems to me, you don't quite clearly see the right of things—the knight hastily interrupts—Of what use is the deed if understanding is lacking, the deed which is not the ripe fruit of the mind. The deed alone is but an empty shell, unless the mind shows it the way to give its action meaning.

Perhaps I was always ready for prompt action, but no dead father e'er appeared to me to show me knowledge and the grounds of truth. And so my acts were only doomed to scorn, the curse of folly followed in my wake, and robbed my deeds of all their proper meaning.

But you were happy, because free from doubts. Your noble being is of one cast. You never felt the silly world's derision. and your soul was innocent of guile.

But the very core of my being was torn and rent, because reflection always fled performance, and I was just a plaything for dark powers. Always my father's voice rang in my ears, but it never steeled my arm to action. It did but feed the torment in my breast and make me conscious of my weakness.

So there remained for me only the foul poison of hypocrisy to still the voice of conscience. My mind invented intellectual masquerades to hide from me the weakness of my will. I sought comfort with painted scenery; I decked myself in a philosopher's robe.

But still the pain remained that would not die, and I grew so repulsive to myself that I could scarcely hear my father's voice.

Knowledge, it seems to me, is the death of will. Who knows too much finds life a heavy burden. He weighs and weighs and still delays to act until for him the whole realm of reality has vanished.

Perhaps the burden really was too heavy for you. Your knowledge may have robbed you of the courage to act. But still 'tis knowledge that must light the torch, if the task of the future is to be fulfilled.

It seems to me I hear the gentle rustling of soft wings. A new beginning is at hand. Say, Hamlet, do you not feel a premonition in your breast that a new era is about to dawn for us?

If Don Quixote and Hamlet have been reconciled, then chaos is shaping into a new world. Out of understanding then will grow for us a deed, and every act will have behind it the power of intelligence.

Out of intelligence comes will, will becomes deed. Out of intellect and will grows the creative impulse, and intellect and will become one in their work. By intelligence and will we shall make a new realm.

Your mind shall forge its own sword and with it bid defiance to the powers of fate. The great hour approaches, the new dawn is reddening now!

Is this the rustling of a new time? Will the dream shape itself into reality? Will Hamlet stimulate the bold knight's mind and Don Quixote lend him his will?

There's no more doubt, the great change nears! His father's voice calls to the noble knight, so that his heart is filled by the grim truth, while Hamlet climbs upon the steed and turns its head toward Toboso.

See how the star beams down from heaven! Its clear light reaches to the bottom of the soul, and far off in the east there glows the pale red dawn!

The monk has now awakened from his deep sleep. Amazed he opens his heavy lids and sees a face bent over him, gazing tenderly down upon him.

A warm splendor beams from the large eyes, flooding his soul with healing balsam, rousing the memory of fond desires.

He feels the gentle pressure of the stranger's hand, and a feeling of quiet bliss steals over him. Here is the peace for which he used to seek. All seems so foreign and so strange, and yet so intimate and homelike; it is like a picture out of his distant youth.

And then he hears the other speak:

Medardus, brother, are you now awake? Has the light of yonder star touched your heart also, chased the shadows from your soul? Do you feel the silent coming of

some great miracle as if a new world were being born? Do you know me, moving here in the starlight?

I know you, image from my dream. It seems as if you were my new self, struggling into the sunlight from the grave.

Heinrich, I have dreamed a deep, deep dream, a dream of you and all eternity, a dream so strange and unworldly as my tired heart had never dreamed before.

It was midnight; with graves on every side I stood alone with my soul's anguish. And then I saw that the ancient stones were trembling and falling over, thudding dully on the dead sward, one by one.

And from the pits they opened shadows climbed which hideously took on the shapes of ghosts and grinned at me in savage mockery. Each had a different form, but each, too, seemed familiar to my mind.

I saw that there lived in each a piece of me; they all were fragments of my ego, but each was traveling his own road, so that they could never form a whole.

Then quickly they joined hands and danced around me in a ring so that I all but lost my senses. Nearer and nearer the mad ring closed in. I felt as if my heart would burst, and my hair stood on end for fear.

The weight of mountains lay upon my breast. I tried to shriek, but could not. There was a lump that choked me in my throat, and not a sound could struggle past it.

Just when I felt my senses going, your image suddenly appeared before my mind. You stood outside the crazy ring and stretched both arms toward me. And then the heavy load was lifted from my breast, and the grim troop of ghosts grew pale.

I tried to grasp your hands, strained toward you with all my strength, but saw that I could get no nearer. The ghosts still stood between us, but still I felt the warm glow of your eyes flowing deep into my very soul.

And then I guessed whence you had come to me, and knew that sometime the hour would come when our hands would join.

I greet you gladly, soft starlight, that wakes me now to a new life. Already distant sounds fall on my ear, proclaiming a new kingdom.

Do you, too, hear that note that sounds from far? The doors of the new realm open soon!

Medardus, I have known you long. Even before the desert took me, your shadow pursued me everywhere.

If ever I found the blue flower and my soul filled with rapture, then I would glimpse the shadow of a monk, which would fall, silent and full of evil boding, on the flower, then vanish as quickly as it came.

But still your nature was a stranger to me. I only guessed what was hidden in the thing that ever swept in hostile circles between me and the light. I shuddered when I saw you in my dreams, and my soul writhed in pain.

But now your nature stands revealed to me. Your pain lies clear before my eyes. I behold the demons that harried you, that ever tore your soul.

You were seeking for the roots of your own self, and could not find them. And so you became your own center of the universe, nothing else existed in your eyes, and everything for you was merely a reflection of yourself.

You felt only the torment of your own pain and the bliss of your own gratified desires; you built high walls about you and dwelt behind them with your shadow.

I, however, followed another clue and never looked for the basis of my being. My heart always took in the whole world. I saw the awful suffering of the sons of men and wished to free them from their misery.

In my breast burned all the torments that my brethren suffered. All the wretchedness of the race laid hold on me, and all the agony that has groaned throughout the ages, but with these, too, the hope of a new order that should make an end of all earthly pains.

And so I looked for the valley of blue flowers that I had seen so often in my dreams. There was the key to the new realm of whose coming I sang to my brethren.

My road led me through strange lands, and disappointment followed in my footsteps. But I held fast to the goal I saw until I found the place that I had sought so long.

Now I held the key within my hand, and bliss profound and satisfying filled my soul. The time of the great suffering was at an end, and before me lay the thousand-year-long era I had yearned for.

But when I brought my treasure forth for men, the blue flower was already withered, and the fortress of my faith fell in ruins. The sweet dream of the poet was at end, and the cold of winter pierced my soul. Then once more I knew your shadow near me and felt the monk strangling the poet.

But today it all is clear to me. No savior can redeem the sons of earth. The free mind makes its own laws. Only when the longing burns in every heart, the great longing for the new realm, will all the barriers fall that now divide us.

No chosen one can break our chains, man must be his own redeemer, must free himself from the heavy yoke of serfdom. Out of all hearts the deed issues that builds bridges to a new world and bears aloft the proud flag of freedom.

And yet there was a blessing on your work. In others you have found yourself, and your longing has spread sparks that through the darkness light the road to day.

I never thought of freeing others, still could not find release myself, release from the torment of my ego.

O Heinrich, terrible is the torment of the man whose sole concern is with himself alone, who never feels the warmth of other souls, that tender We in which alone the I can find itself.

Like an outlaw, burdened with a curse, he drags his dull existence through life's tangled paths, fighting against the specters he himself calls up.

Happy the man who lives in others also, and takes his brothers' joys and sorrows for his own. It is only from the We release can come.

Do you see, Medardus, how swift the dawn is going? I think a new day is at hand for us.

We sought for God upon two different roads, and Fate has led us here together. And now we know the times are fulfilled. Out of monk and poet a new line stems that shall grow and flourish and renew the world.

It is not good to forget others, but it is bad to shun one's self. Just as the atoms find themselves only in the whole, so our I finds itself once more in the We.

That is a petty love that thinks always of itself, but renunciation of the ego can never bring salvation to the sons of earth. Only in union does life's fortune smile on us.

In community shines the dawn of freedom. In union the true *I* flourishes and thrives. Here justice blooms and brothers' love, and in these unfold the forces of the will, and the native strength of each takes root.

The new realm lies before our eyes. The star that woke us has already faded, and the new sun rises now in splendor.

We greet you, morn of promise! The mighty miracle is near, the hour strikes!

In the east the sky glows with red and purple, and the sun arises, radiant, from the depths. Gone are the dead reaches of the desert, and a land of green stretches out to the horizon.

From the steep cliffs clear fountains start, and in the valley spreads a dreamy lake, from whose depths the blue of heaven shines back in all its glory.

And now the Six step forth before the sphinx, hands joined in token of firm union. Their eyes are turned to the morning that beams on a new realm.

A quiver runs through the dead stone, and the slender limbs of the ancient sphinx, who has sat enthroned here through so many thousand years, gently relax. Her eyes no longer gaze into the distance. A glow of warmth shines from the face of stone, and the cold lips gently part:

Six roads led you to the portals of my realm. Each road held a different clue, but all led to the selfsame goal. So long as each one followed his own clue it was denied him to solve my riddle. But now all six have joined in union, and each feels in himself something of all. The parts have joined to form a whole.

The ancient riddle that lay hid in me has now been solved—the times are now fulfilled. The new man is building his new realm. Justice and freedom are found in union.—

* * *

*The ancient image falls in dusty ruins, and a marvelous flower, blue and delicate,
springs from the place where once it sat enthroned.*

*The portals of the new realm open. The new man treads the new earth, and from the
heavens ring songs of jubilation!*

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