

# Online Supplement I to *The End and the Beginning*

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# I

## Feuilletons and fairy tales.

### A sampling

by Hermynia Zur Mühlen

(Translations by L. Gossman)

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#### Editor's Note

The following short stories and newspaper *feuilletons*, all translated by the editor, have been selected from among the hundreds published by Zur Mühlen because of the light they throw on her inspiration and motivation as a writer. Their themes and topics pervade her entire *oeuvre*: the injustice, violence, and cruelty of modern capitalist societies; the miserable lives of the poor and downtrodden; the way a patriarchal culture prevents women of all classes from developing into full human beings; and, not least, the tensions within her own utopian aspirations. On the one hand, for example, the conviction that it is a human responsibility, and especially a responsibility of the artist, to confront an ugly and unjust world and rouse others to confront and combat it, so that a better world may come into being; on the other, nostalgia for the beauty, peace, and harmony of the *hortus conclusus*, the protected childhood paradise that Zur Mühlen herself once knew in her grandmother's villa in the little lakeside resort town of Gmunden. On the one hand, the writer's moral responsibility to create a literature of combat, a *littérature engagée* ("We Have to Tell Them"); on the other, the temptation of estheticism, of excluding ugliness from one's writing in order to create a manageable and esthetically satisfying

imaginary world (“Painted on Ivory”). In her *feuilletons* as well as in her novels, Zur Mühlen suggests that withdrawal from the world of conflict and violence is not only immoral, but may result, for the artist, in an impoverishment of her art, and that, in addition, an individual who has shut herself off from the everyday world of passions and desires or who has been protected from it, is rendered defenceless against the world (“Death of a Shadow” – recognizably contemporary with the novel *Unsere Töchter die Nazinen*). One of the *feuilletons* seems to suggest, however, that any career as a writer requires sacrifice. To the degree that sympathizing and identifying with others is the condition of her ability to create fictional characters, the writer may find that her own life has been diminished as well as enriched by her capacity for empathizing and living vicariously (“A Secondary Happiness”).

Like everything Zur Mühlen wrote, these short pieces are rooted in her own experience and that of her time. Thus, for instance, the three samples from the collection entitled *Der rote Heiland*, which was published soon after the First World War (the little dramatic scene that gave the collection its title, together with “Confession,” and “High Treason”), reflect the widespread pacifism, the revulsion against war, and the demand for radical social change in Germany in the years following the country’s disastrous defeat. “Miss Brington” and “The Señora,” both published in 1941, reflect the experience of exile. The former evokes the characteristically drab, run-down English boarding-house with which many exiles, who were accustomed to a very different kind of life, became unhappily all too familiar after fleeing Hitler’s Germany and Austria. At the same time, Zur Mühlen manages to transform the watchful, frugal, hard-working, and worn-out landlady, Miss Brington, who is always on the brink of falling from respectability into poverty, into a universal figure of emotional and physical deprivation and loneliness. “The Señora” dramatizes the dilemma faced by refugees, particularly those who happen to be writers in a language other than that of their country of asylum. Should they adapt to their new environment and risk losing the anger and indignation, the passionate opposition to tyranny that is the core of their identity, the most precious possession left to them? Or should they nurture their hatred and risk losing their humanity?

To the *feuilletons* have been added two samples of the “socialist” fairy tales for which Zur Mühlen achieved a degree of international renown – one (“The Spectacles”) in a new translation by the editor, and one (“The Sparrow”) in Ida Dailes’ translation (considerably revised by the editor)

for a collection of four of Zur Mühlen's tales published by The Daily Worker Publishing Company under the title *Fairy Tales for Workers' Children* (Chicago, 1925). A short essay by the editor on the fairy tale and its use for propaganda purposes has also been included among these supplementary on-line materials.

Lionel Gossman, November 2010

# 1. The Red Redeemer

(A church. The candles on the altar have been lit. Above the altar there is a large black wooden cross. In front of it, on the steps, a man in rags, barefoot, with a worn, tormented expression. He is leaning on one arm, which rests on the altar.)

**The priest** (in his vestments, enters through the open church door, followed by two altar-boys in surplices. He marches up to the altar, suddenly stops in his tracks, and stares at the man in rags): A man in front of the altar. Unconsecrated hands touching the most holy. Sacrilege! Away with you! Away with you!

**The man in rags:** This is my house.

**The taller altar-boy:** (shyly pulls at the priest's vestments): Reverend Father, the cross...

**The priest** (quickly turns to look at the cross and cries out): Gone! Where is the Redeemer?

**The smaller altar-boy:** On the altar, don't you see?

**The man in rags:** Blessed are they who are pure in heart, for they shall behold the Lord.

**The priest** (glares at the man in rags and seems gradually to recognize him. He is horrified.) What? What is going on here? The Redeemer belongs on the cross.

**The man in rags:** And if he got down from it and came among the living? Don't you yourself teach that your God is not dead? Now you can see that he is alive.

**The priest** (confused): The Redeemer's place is on the cross... The faithful will be coming to Mass... If they find the cross empty... and the Redeemer here, alive, like a man.... (Shouting) Get back on the cross. We need a God that is dead.

**The man in rags:** Yes, a God that neither sees nor hears, a lifeless piece of wood.

**The priest** (desperate): Such disorder! You get up off the cross like a man getting out of bed. You sow confusion in people's minds... This conduct does not become our Redeemer...

**The man in rags:** Aren't all of you celebrating my Resurrection today? So you know that I am alive.

**The priest:** That's what we teach the ignorant, the people.

**The man in rags:** Why?

**The priest:** They yield to our wishes better when they believe in you.

**The man in rags** (astonished). I don't understand.

**The priest:** They are afraid of angering you if they oppose us.

**The man in rags:** That is not what I taught.

**The priest:** Your teaching is a distorting mirror. Everyone finds a distorted image of himself in it.

**The man in rags.** The lesson of my life is something quite different.

**The priest:** Your life? Do we know that you ever lived?

**The man in rags:** So you teach something you yourself don't believe in?

**The priest:** Who believes in fairy tales today?

**The man in rags:** What do you call a fairy tale?

**The priest:** The Resurrection.

**The man in rags:** You are all blind! I rose from the dead a hundred times before your eyes and yet you didn't see it?

**The priest** (correcting him sternly like a schoolmaster): You appear not to know the legend that was spun around your name. You arose from the dead only once. In Jerusalem.

**The man in rags:** No, a hundred times, in everyone in whom love was stronger than death. I lived in every rebel languishing in prison in his chains. I was crucified in everyone who was hanged on your gallows.

**The priest:** Blasphemy!

**The man in rags:** Can God himself be guilty of blasphemy?

**The priest:** Your divinity is questionable. You yourself described yourself as the son of man.

**The man in rags:** There is only one God: the man who loves.

**The priest:** You speak of love. Did your rebels love the victims they killed?

**The man in rags:** In pure hands, killing can be good.

**The priest** (outraged): Criminal! Murderer! Communist!

**The man in rags:** Are you going to call the police?

**The priest:** Why am I talking to you? You don't exist. You never really existed.

**The man in rags:** For you and your like, I don't.

**The priest:** No one may arise from the dead. That is not permitted by law. A dead man must stay dead. Get back on the cross!

**The man in rags:** Doesn't the Church teach that with the commission of every sin the Redeemer is crucified anew?

**The smaller altar-boy** (eagerly): Yes, that is what I learned in Sunday school.

**The man in rags** (suddenly fearsome): You all crucify me every day, every hour. Wherever someone suffers because of you, wherever a child cries because it is hungry, wherever someone sick dies in misery, wherever someone is worn out by daily drudgery, I am crucified.

**The priest:** You are a dead, lifeless piece of wood. You cannot see.

**The man in rags:** Your guilt is so enormous that dead matter acquires eyes to see it and a mouth to scream in protest against it.

**The smaller altar-boy** (begins to cry): I'm scared.

**The man in rags** (gently): You need not be scared. (He kneels down next to the boy). Look, now I am smaller than you, and that is as it should be, for you, little Man, little God, are the future.

**The priest** (shrieeks): Blasphemy!

**The man in rags** (rises): It is all of you who blaspheme against God. Every act of yours, every gesture is blasphemy. The potbelly that waltzes past the hungry, the silk dress that rustles past the half-naked, that is blasphemy. The factory that reaches to the heavens and devours its workers is blasphemy. The foul-smelling hovels where the poor are housed, that is blasphemy. The brothel, where love is put up for sale, that is blasphemy. The battlefield where human beings die like dogs so that you all can line your pockets, that is blasphemy. You yourselves, your very being, your persisting, that is blasphemy.

**The priest** (mockingly): You won't ever be able to rid the world of us.

**The man in rags:** You think not? Perhaps you aren't aware that I have already come down from every cross you all have nailed me to. Perhaps you don't know that I have risen from every grave you all buried me in.

**The priest** (bewildered and unsettled): You speak like a madman. Who are you?

**The man in rags:** I am the Resurrection and the Life in Humanity.

**The priest** (dully, as if he had lost his wits): What is the Resurrection and the Life?

**The man in rags** (in a strong, clear voice): The revolution!

**The priest** (shrieks): Revolution... Help... Police... (To the altar-boys): Run! Call the police! I always suspected that if Jesus did really exist he had to have been insane. Normal people don't get themselves crucified.

**The man in rags:** No, they look around for ministerial positions.

**The priest** (in despair): Nothing is sacred for this individual. Now he is maligning the government! That is more dangerous than blaspheming against God, for God doesn't have servants with rubber truncheons and machine-guns that he can call into action. Get a move on, boys, run. Get the police. (The two altar boys rush off. The church bells begin to ring.)

**The priest:** The faithful will be here in a moment. The empty cross above the altar... All this disorder... If the Bishop hears of it... Why did all this have to happen in my parish?... (Pleading) Get back on the cross and I will be your servant for the rest of my life.

**The man in rags:** How often have you said that same thing to the people?

**The priest** (at a loss): The people, the people! What does the people matter to me?

**The man in rags:** I am the people, the people that you all have crucified. I am the people that was killed and that has arisen from the dead. Woe unto you. (Two policemen rush into the church,)

**The priest** (panting): Here... This is the man... Blasphemy... Incitement to class hatred... A Communist...

**One of the policemen:** That's enough.

**The other policeman:** Wait. (To the man in rags) Do you have identity papers? Who are you?

**The man in rags** (rises to his full height). I am the red Redeemer who has come to pass judgment.

**The first policeman:** There you have it. A Red. (The two policemen take hold of the man in rags and drag him out of the church)

**The priest** (confused): A bad dream... a terrifying nightmare. Didn't someone come and say that the story we tell about Christ is true, that God is alive?

(The organ begins to play. The choir is heard singing lustily: Christ is arisen. Halleluja! Halleluja!)

*Der rote Heiland* (Leipzig-Plagwitz: Verlag Die Wölfe, 1924), pp. 49-52.

## 2. Confession

Dear Doctor:

When you left my cell an hour ago, you were extremely irritated and told me angrily that no one would be able to make any sense of what I had been saying; that my violent outbursts were making things even more difficult for you; and that in light of my behavior it had become impossible for you to build a case for my defense. You are quite right. Although I did try very hard to explain the matter to you, I could not find the right words, and it was impossible for me, without flying into a rage, to say the one thing that holds the key to the whole situation. If that thing were to cross my lips, I felt, a dam would burst somewhere inside me: despair, hatred, fury, and an uncontrollable desire for revenge would surge like storm waves over my brain and completely overwhelm any rational thought. Maybe I can present my case better in writing.

I am accused of murder, of the murder of an honorable citizen of our town – and a good friend.

I know how people see me. They think I am a bloodthirsty monster still greedy for blood after three years at the front and ready to commit murder to get it.

Three years at the front, doctor – do you know what that means? It means three years of misery, horror, despair – and blood! Three years of living in mortal fear, three years of committing murder! This can change a man. And yet when I came home after having been lucky enough to get shot in the leg and invalided out, I immediately took up my old life again, went to the office, worked, and lived contentedly with my wife – as though nothing had happened.

From time to time, at night, in my dreams, I heard the thunder of artillery fire and the groans of the wounded, but those phantoms vanished with the dawn and everything was normal again.

Until one summer evening, when the horror that seemed to have been

forgotten opened its hellish maw and belched its stinking, diabolical breath in my face.

I was sitting with my wife at dinner. The last rays of the setting sun were streaming through the red curtains of the dining-room. Suddenly my wife cried out: "Look at your hand. It looks as though it was covered with blood!" I glanced down at my hand and all at once felt cold shivers run down my spine. When had I seen this before? Yes, it was during a bayonet attack, I remembered. I also remembered my horror and disgust as I tried to wipe off the sticky gore. My wife laughed and placed her hand on mine for a moment. How white that hand was, how pure and unsullied. But mine?

From then on I had the feeling that my hand could never be washed clean again. The sickening smell of blood hovered around me day and night. Grisly images would spring up before my eyes. There was now a hole in the curtain that had come down between me and the things I had experienced.

Perhaps I could have borne all this. Perhaps I would have sunk back again into my blissful mindlessness. But I noticed something else: *All the people around me had clean hands*. In the office I would stop in the middle of writing as I observed my fellow-employees' hands gliding white and spotless over white paper. I no longer saw people's faces or bodies, I saw only hands.

Gradually a hatred of those with white hands began to stir in my heart. Repressed and concealed, it grew more and more fierce. I had had to commit murder, I had had to besmirch myself with the blood of my fellow-man; while they had stayed home, innocent and good, with their clean hands.

In order not to have to see those accursed white hands, I withdrew from all human company. My lovely wife became abhorrent to me. I was overcome by disgust whenever she touched me.

The man I murdered had been my friend. He tried to shake me out of my depression, he made every conceivable effort to distract me. There were times when I was touched by his goodness and kindness, times when I felt aching compassion and fervent love for all human beings, when I wanted to help them and liberate them. But no sooner did my glance fall on their hands than hatred boiled up in me again and poisoned my soul.

This situation may have lasted for about three months. Finally, I reached a point at which I no longer saw human beings, only spotless white hands

fluttering derisively before my eyes and pointing accusingly at my guilty, bloodstained fingers.

A new thought had wormed its way into my brain: that the world will not be redeemed until all human beings have had their hands dipped in guilt and blood, until there is nobody who can go about bearing the mark of innocence. Everybody must be driven into guilt and smut so as to be made aware of his or her wickedness and led to do penance for it. Anyone who refuses must be eliminated.

One evening my friend came to visit me and would not be put out by the surliness with which I received him. He chatted animatedly about all kinds of things, including attacks on him by his enemies in the newspaper. Suddenly he uttered the fateful words. Laughing, he raised his hand and said: "Their attacks don't bother me in the least. My hands are clean!"

In that moment all the horror I had experienced raced through my brain, I saw the chaos of combat, heard the screams of the wounded, the death rattles of the dying, I saw on both sides a huge mass of innocent murderers rushing into battle, goaded on by whips wielded by clean, white hands.

You know the rest; there was a revolver in my desk drawer. But now you will understand a detail that puzzled the police; namely that the victim's hands were smeared all over with blood.

I have confessed to the murder and I am ready to pay with my life for my crime— not, however, for the crime that the court will condemn me for, but for the killing of my brothers at the front. I was a murderer long before I used my revolver against my friend.

One more request, dear Doctor. If the death sentence is carried out on me, please see to it that my hands are not washed. I do not want to appear before my eternal Judge with the mark of inextinguishable guilt – white hands.

With the deepest respect, Doctor,

I am,

Yours truly,

Karl David.

*Der rote Heiland* (Leipzig-Plagwitz: Verlag Die Wölfe, 1924), pp. 71-74.

### 3. High Treason

The uniform hung loose on his long, skinny body. He walked with his shoulders hunched, like some one carrying an enormous load and he shuffled about in his heavy army-issue boots. Everyone made fun of him, mocked his slow speech, the strong Jewish accent with which he spoke Russian, the awkward movements of his perfectly beautiful hands. Impatient officers would yell "Durak" (Dumbell, Fool) at him more than at anyone else and the name stuck to him. Soon no one knew his real name. In the entire regiment he was known only as "Durak."

And yet he was well-liked. If you did not feel well or were homesick, you could go to "Durak" and get consolation. If you were hungry, you could be sure that "Durak" would share his skimpy ration with you. And rumor had it that you could die more easily, even joyfully, if "Durak" sat at your bedside and held your hand.

The officers considered him a halfwit. Yet he obeyed orders willingly, if clumsily, and he was touchingly eager to oblige. Once, however, there had been a painful incident. The lieutenant, a good-natured young fellow, ordered "Durak" to do night duty in the sick bay, and "Durak" went there as commanded. He cast a glance at the long row of sighing, groaning bodies and quietly asked the doctor:

"Nikolai Ivanovitch, would you kindly tell me if these men can be made well again?"

The plump doctor laughed.

"Hopefully they can. You must just take good care of them."

"And when they are well again, what will happen to them?"

"What will happen to them? Why, they'll be ready to be put to work again."

"What for?"

"What for? Why, for the war, you idiot!"

"I take care of them and make them better, so that they can kill and be killed themselves?"

"Quite so," the doctor said, somewhat perplexed.

Suddenly, in mounting rage, "Durak" tore off his white overall and threw it at the doctor's feet.

"I won't cure murderers!" he screamed in a shrill, breaking voice. "I won't cure sacrificial animals for the false god Baal." And he rushed from the room.

Some time later, his regiment came under fire. A major offensive was ordered for the next morning. The soldiers slunk around despondently. In the general melancholy no one noticed "Durak"'s somber fury. At eight in the evening a solemn religious service was held. In his gleaming robes the Orthodox priest came out of his tent and took up a position on an elevated spot, surrounded by the soldiers. After the prayers he began a speech. He spoke of God's goodness and the loyalty each soldier owed to the top war commanders. He spoke of the army's courage. "You are marching forth to destroy the enemies of God and Man," he said unctuously. "The battle that lies before you is pleasing to God, and..."

He was interrupted by a piercing cry of "No." "Durak" was pushing his way through the motionless crowd, a riding whip in his raised hand. He threw himself like a madman on the priest and a whistling sound filled the air as the whip tore through it.

"You lie, Priest. You blaspheme against God. You turn a place of prayer and spiritual healing into a den of murderers." He had pushed the priest down and taken his place, His voice rent the darkness.

"I kept silent because I was afraid, because I knew what would happen to me if I spoke out. But now I have to speak. Hear me, brothers. The battle that lies before us is the work of the devil. We are murderers. We march out with intent to murder. To murder other men. Men like ourselves. And we blaspheme against God when we pray to Him – from Whom we received the command 'Thou shalt not kill' – and ask Him to help us murder other human beings. They lie to us when they tell us that the others are our enemies. There are no enemies, only other human beings, children of God, brothers and sisters. March out tomorrow morning, brothers, and when you see the others, throw down your weapons, stretch out your arms to them, and call out "Peace be with you."

Led by the lieutenant, several soldiers had pushed their way through the confused crowd of men. "Durak" was set upon and overpowered from behind. Half smothered, his voice still rang out through the hall. "Do not kill! Love one another!"

This time it was not possible to excuse his behavior on the grounds that he was mentally confused. Certainly the man was crazy, but on the eve of battle he had called on the soldiers to mutiny. For that there was no pardon. When he was informed that he would be shot within the half-hour, he smiled like someone hearing something old and familiar and spoke the following strange, incomprehensible words:

“The Third Day is still a long way off. But in the far distance I can already see it dawning.”

\* \* \* \* \*

A short time later a soldier called the lieutenant from his tent. “Sir, come and see the dead man!”

“Why? What’s up?” The lieutenant looked in astonishment at the man’s pale, distraught face.

“It’s... a miracle... I don’t dare to tell you. We pulled off his boots. For it would be a shame to let them go into the ground with him...”

“And?”

“Come and see for yourself, Sir.”

The lieutenant followed the soldier. “Durak” lay stretched out on the ground, his feet bare and his arms spread out. A bullet had hit him on the left side and opened up a gaping wound. With a flashlight, the lieutenant bent over the dead man, then drew back in terror. “Durak”’s hands and feet bore bloody stigmata as if they had been pierced through by something sharp.

In the darkness a few soldiers fell on their knees and prayed.

*Der rote Heiland* (Leipzig-Plagwitz: Verlag Die Wölfe, 1924), pp. 67-70.

## 4. Death of a Shade

“Have you heard,” I was asked by an acquaintance, “that Perdita W. shot herself?”

I nodded. “I’ve been expecting it for months.”

“You were expecting it? I don’t understand. She was so, so...”

He looked for the right word. Revealingly, it did not come to him.

“The truth is that she was not so...,” I replied. “And that’s why she shot herself.”

“You don’t seem very upset.” My acquaintance was rather indignant. “I had always thought you and she were close friends.”

“That’s exactly why. I know she had no other option. It was the only possible thing she could do.”

He looked at me uncomprehendingly.

“Let me explain. The Perdita you knew was not the real Perdita. The woman who was passionate about politics and ran to all the public meetings of her Party was not the same woman as the one who reached for a revolver the day before yesterday... Outwardly she had no reason to commit suicide. She was financially secure, she was in good health and, for a person of forty-three, she looked very good, which even today is still one of the most important things in life for a woman. And yet, there was simply no other way out for her.”

“I really don’t understand you.”

“We were school friends and I often spent the holidays with Perdita’s parents so as not to have to stay on at the convent. Perdita’s parents had a large villa in a health resort, a short way out of the little town itself. It was surrounded by a wonderful, beautifully tended garden. I can still remember the large beds of roses in front of the house. The garden was set back from the road, and the life Perdita’s parents led was set back a little from real life. I have never since come across anything quite so harmonious. No voice was ever raised in that house. The servants came and went without a sound.

No door was ever slammed shut. On Sundays no one in the family ever left the garden. 'There are so many people on the road on a Sunday,' Perdita's father used to say.

"Perdita was an only child. Though she was not spoiled, everything revolved around her, and for her there was really nothing in this world except the two quiet, distinguished people she called Papa and Mami. Don't imagine that Perdita's parents were boring or uncultured. Her very name reveals her father's love of Shakespeare. During the holidays, when it was raining, the old gentleman – he had married late in life and when I got to know him, his hair was already grey – would read to us from the works of classical German literature or, from time to time, from those of other writers – Stifter, Dickens, Bulwer Lytton. Those were lovely quiet hours that we spent in the large library. We sat up very straight in the high mahogany chairs – for 'ladies do not sprawl on furniture.' I sometimes had the feeling that the raindrops fell more gently here, around this house, than anywhere else.

"Later, when we were grown up, we drifted apart, as often happens. Once Perdita wrote me about a rather vague love affair, of which nothing came, because Papa and Mami found the young man 'loud and vulgar.' Perdita appears not to have taken the matter very much to heart. She was happy enough with Papa and Mami. Being separated from them would have caused her much grief.

"The years passed. The World War broke out, then came the Revolution. From time to time I paid a visit to Perdita and her parents. Here, nothing had changed. The same stillness, the same harmony: three people who loved each other and had shut themselves off from the world. No, that is not quite right: three people who had absolutely no idea that there is another world than theirs.

"Five years ago Papa and Mami died, the one soon after the other. It turned out that Perdita still possessed a considerable fortune – not large enough, however, for her to hold on to the spacious villa and the numerous servants needed to maintain it. She sold the villa and moved into town. Here, in her pretty house, she lived as she had lived at home. Quiet, refined people came in the afternoon for tea or in the evening for dinner. She had kept on the cook, who had been with her parents for twenty years, and the food was always excellent. But Perdita did not feel right. She always went around a little lost. She missed Mami's love and Papa's kindly authority. At thirty-eight, she faced life like an eighteen-year old.

"She had brought much of the old furniture with her as well as an enlarged photograph of the villa, showing, in front of the house, next to the large bed of roses, Papa, Mami, and Perdita at the age of ten.

"I liked visiting her. The quiet did me good, even though I found it unnatural in our present day and age.

"Then came the great experience that completely altered Perdita's life and finally drove her into the arms of death. An acquaintance took her 'for fun,' wanting to see how she would react to something of that kind, to a political gathering. At first Perdita felt uncomfortable, because of the large numbers of people, the countless loud voices. She could not quite understand the speech but when it was followed by wild applause and shouts of 'Heil' from all present, she suddenly noticed that she too had raised her voice in loud, unconstrained yelling, as she had never done before in her entire life. For forty years, she had conducted herself quietly and with dignity, but now suddenly she could shout, scream, clap, stamp her feet. The primitive and the elemental broke loose in her and she experienced something she had never experienced before: an overwhelming feeling of being one with the screaming, yelling mass. Beside her stood an elderly little man with fanatical blue eyes: he gave Perdita a benevolent look and whispered: 'Yes, indeed. The Führer gave a great speech.'

"The Führer, the Leader, that was just the word Perdita needed to hear. She had found the authority that she substituted for Papa's, she had found the man who gave orders and who had to be obeyed without one's ever having to think for oneself.

"I met Perdita a few weeks after this political gathering. She had already joined the Party. I hardly recognized her. She seemed a good few years younger, she moved freely and gracefully, her eyes had a sparkle in them, she was a different person. In an earlier time, when people were still romantic, young girls in love looked like that. And the comparison is apt: Perdita was in love with the Party. Perdita gave the Party all the overflowing love she had stored up within herself for years. She could speak of nothing else. She could think of nothing else.

"As you know, I am on the opposite side politically and it came to an argument between us. 'You have no notion of what is at stake here,' I said to her. 'Do you have any idea what your program is?' 'Program?' She stared at me. 'When we come to power, everything will be right again.'

"Despite my irritation with her, I felt that for Perdita what really counted was the 'we' and not the 'power.' She had been lonely for so long, and now

she belonged to a great Party which took the place for her of everything she had lost or had never possessed. 'Read your pamphlets,' I said impatiently. 'I'd like to know what you think of their tone.' She smiled. 'I will do that.'

"As I said, we parted at odds with each other and for a long time I did not see Perdita again.

"Then one day I ran into her in the street. She had become quite white and went about just as lost and alone as before her 'conversion.' She greeted me shyly, as if she feared I might not return her greeting. That sent an arrow through my heart. 'May I stop by and pay you a visit?' I asked. Her mouth formed into a smile, which truly was not one. 'Yes, do. I would like that very much.'

"The house had not changed a bit: the elegant Empire style chair still stood in front of the tiny, un-practical ladies' writing desk, the same silk cushions still lay on the Empire chaise longue, albeit somewhat faded and worn, and the enlarged photograph of Perdita's parents' house still hung on the wall, above the chaise longue. But it had faded; it was almost impossible now to discern the individual figures on it.

"Conversation was somewhat strained at first. It wasn't until Perdita made us tea in the old silver teapot I had known as a child at her parents' house that we began to unbend. 'Are you still in the Party?' I asked her. 'No.' Her soft voice sounded even softer than usual. 'I couldn't take it. All the noise, the shouting and bawling, and the newspapers. They shout too, just like the people. I had to have quiet about me again.' 'Have you found it?' Her pale face became sad. 'No. There is no quiet any more. Even when I don't actually hear the shouting, it rings in my ears. The whole world is shouting...'

"A car passed in the street, honking its horn; Perdita twitched nervously. 'On Sundays,' she said, half dreaming, 'we never left the garden, because of the crowds of people. I don't go out on Sundays now either, but the noise comes right through my windows... I can't get away from it.' I felt sorry for her. 'You live too much on your own. You have to spend some time with friends, as you used to do.' She smiled. 'I don't live altogether on my own,' she said. 'You see, when I can't stand this whole world any more, I gaze on the picture of our villa and I can feel the deep peace and the quiet happiness of those times. You remember, don't you? – my bedroom was here, and here, under it, was the verandah and the main drawing-room, and over there you can see the window of the library where Papa used so often to read to us. But' – here her voice became filled with sadness – 'the

picture is fading. The house looks a bit like a house of ghosts now. The figures of Papa and Mami are almost impossible to make out. Only mine is still really there. When it too fades...'

"She fell silent, and something in the expression of her face frightened me. 'Don't be childish, Perdita. The picture is old and the photographer used matt paper. Matt paper doesn't hold the image well.' She again smiled. 'Matt paper that doesn't hold the image well. A down-to-earth explanation. You're probably right. But we are like the photograph. We have turned out matt too. We couldn't tolerate the real sun, real life, and we faded as soon as we came into contact with them.' She looked over at the picture: 'I'm curious to know how long I will still be recognizable in it.'

"My visit to Perdita took place on a cool day in February. I had planned to go back and see her again soon, but something always came up – work, sickness, something. In May – it was an especially hot, sunny May – I drove off to the country for a month. I came back a week ago and resolved to visit Perdita the following day.

"On that next day, I received a registered letter. When I opened it, the photograph of Perdita's parents' house fell out. Undoubtedly the maid had forgotten to close the shutters on one of the hot days, for shadowy outlines were all you could now make out in the photograph. The three figures had totally vanished. I am a down-to earth person, a realist, but a cold shiver ran down my spine as I looked at that picture: I knew what it meant.

"Perdita saw herself fading away and vanishing from this life; she watched herself growing more and more shadowy and unreal with each passing day... On that same day I was informed that she had shot herself the night before."

"It really was the photographer's fault," my acquaintance suggested. "If only he had used glossy paper..."

"He couldn't use glossy paper if he was to get the right tone for this house and these people. He was a good photographer with genuine artistic sensitivity. You really shouldn't blame him."

I took the picture from the writing desk and showed it to my acquaintance.

"You can still make out the bed of roses," he said.

"Yes, but that's all. Everything else has vanished, as if it had never been. And when I look at that picture, I wonder whether Perdita W.'s world was ever real, whether everything in it was not a shadow, everything – except for the roses."

"Tod eines Schattens," *Der Wiener Tag*, 8 December 1932, reprinted in *Fahrt ins Licht. Sechshundsechzig Stationen. Erzählungen* (Vienna: Verlag Ludwig Nath, 1936; reprint Klagenfurt: Sisyphus Verlag, 1999), pp. 167-173.

## 5. A Secondary Happiness

Christine was fourteen years old when the World War broke out – a quiet, well brought up, shy girl with long brown braids and large, grey, somewhat startled eyes.

“She won’t be as pretty as her mother,” people said in the little provincial town where her father was the mayor. “But there is something very sweet about her, and she is so touchingly unselfish.”

Christine owed her selflessness to her upbringing by her mother. From earliest childhood, it had been impressed on her that she herself was completely unimportant, whereas everybody else was enormously important. One should not think about oneself but only take a keen interest in the lives of others.

Little Christine was constantly being asked the same question: Aren’t you pleased that Mama can go to the beach? Aren’t you thrilled that your dear Papa has received a decoration? Isn’t it wonderful that your friend has won first prize in school?

At first Christine would dutifully answer yes. She would never have dared to contradict her attractive, strong-willed mother. Then gradually this automatic yes turned into a yes that expressed conviction. She had no pleasures of her own, but as she was nonetheless eager, being young, for a little happiness, she participated in the pleasures of others the way a smoker, whose doctor has ordered him to give up smoking, sits beside cigar and cigarette-puffing strangers so as to get a whiff, at least, of the smoke. She took pleasure in her girlfriends’ new clothes. She herself wore her mother’s cast-offs which were altered to fit her, for Madam Mayor needed the family money for her own purposes. She took pleasure in the good marks of her school friends. That she too had all A’s in her report card was simply a matter of course; she had her dear parents, who had done so much for her, to thank for it. And as she grew older, she took pleasure in the engagements and marriages of the other girls and then, later, in the

babies and the *maternal joy* of her former school friends. Everything came to her second hand, as her clothes had done. She knew no happiness of her own, only a secondary happiness; no joy, only the joy she got from the joy of others; no pain, only the pain she felt at the pain of others. And when the thought did strike her that she too could have a personal life, she was alarmed by it and rejected it brusquely, feeling that she had committed a sin. To everyone in her small circle she was “dear, good Christine,” to whom one came when one was in trouble or had some overflowing happiness that one simply had to tell someone about.

She lived many lives; the life of her best friend Myra, that of her parents, that of her brother and his young wife. She fell in love along with others and lay awake at night thinking of the tender words some male friend had whispered to some female friend, she experienced the feelings of the bride standing at the altar, she watched, full of joy, as the *young couple* set off on their honeymoon. She was a bride, a wife, a mother, and a widow through others. But at no time, not for a single hour was she ever Christine, a person, a pretty girl with a right to her own experiences and her own happiness.

She grew older, yet she looked younger than all the others. She walked dreamily through the narrow streets of the little town – no, not she herself, but Myra or Trudy or Sylvia. Her father died, her mother re-married and Christine took pleasure in her mother’s new happiness, in the proximity of which she was given the privilege of living. Later she took pleasure in a little step-sister and as the latter learned to speak and to walk, she took pleasure in the pleasure this gave the little one. Without ever having had a life of her own, Christine was happy. Was so, until happiness of her own approached in the shape of the new pharmacist. The tender words addressed to her, the kisses that seemed almost brutal to her and a lot less blissful than those her friends had told her about, filled her with alarm. Her mother, to whom Christine had begun to be burdensome, insisted that her daughter marry the pharmacist. Christine, who as a bridesmaid, smiling happily, had so often accompanied her friends to the altar, wept bitterly as she herself stood in the church in her bridal veil. Everything was so alien and yet so close, so unbearably close. The honeymoon trip to Venice was a nightmare. She had the feeling that she was a shade forced into becoming a living human being. She remembered her friends and the happy times when she had followed them, in her thoughts, on their honeymoon trips. She remembered the daydreams in which she had imagined for herself the happiness of the young couple. How different that had been. Her own

happiness strutted around prosaically in his slippers in the evening, drank rather more beer than he could hold, snored loudly next to her in bed, woke up unexpectedly in the middle of the night and pulled her into his arms. In vain Christine told herself: He is a good man, he loves me, I have to be happy. She had grown too used to a secondary happiness to be able to bear her own. Little by little she was assailed by tormenting doubts: Had it been the same with the others too? Had they been lying to me when they said: It was heavenly.

She had been thrilled by the picture postcards of Italian cities that she had received from her girlfriends. Now that she could view the churches and palaces with her own eyes, she saw only lifeless stone; the sea struck her as a desolate watery waste; and she became homesick for the little grey town where she had lived for thirty years. But she was also fearful of returning to a home of her own. She who had so willingly helped others set up house, felt only exhaustion and a leaden sadness when she thought of furniture of her own, a household of her own – and of the life, the life of her own, that she would now have to lead as Frau Grunder. She will no longer be “dear, good Christine,” she will no longer be the person people come to so that she can take part in their joy or their sorrow; she will no longer be absorbed completely in the lives of others and thus escape from her own. The thought of all this was unbearable, and with each passing day it grew still more unbearable, until one evening, when the pharmacist was asleep, she packed her little travel bag and took the next train to Florence.

From here she wrote to her husband, asking for a divorce. The pharmacist would not agree to it. He could not understand what Christine had against him and he was fond of her.

But Christine knew that if she wanted to go on living, she had to get free, at all costs. With the help of an impoverished young Italian, who was ready to do anything for a little money, she set up an adulterous affair that was no more real than all of Christine’s earlier life.

The marriage was dissolved. For a month the little town had a topic of conversation that mostly began with “Who would have thought it of that well brought up girl? That’s the way it is, that’s the way it is. Still waters run deep.”

Christine, who had been left a small inheritance by her father, did not return to her home town. She settled down in a different part of the country. Within a few months people here also spoke of “dear, good Christine,” and came to her to tell her of their joys and sorrows.

After a year Christine had almost completely forgotten the dreadful episode of her marriage. She went on living the lives of others and once more enjoyed the secondary happiness that is without a dark side.

She was happy again.

“Nebenglück,” *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, 28 November 1933.

## 6. The Señora

From time to time, some old, long forgotten image suddenly emerges, unsolicited and for no apparent reason, from the picture gallery of a memory stretching back over many, many years, and springs to life. A ray of sunlight shines on it, colours we thought were faded revive, and the subject of the image – a person or a landscape – pushes its way into the forefront of our mind, obscuring everything else.

That is what is happening to me these days with the Señora. The frame of the image is springtime in Switzerland, blossoming fruit-trees, the blue waters of a lake, and a large, bright hall. In the hall, always in the same corner, a slight, gaunt woman, whose thin tapered fingers work on netting, day in, day out, restlessly, almost without a moment's pause.

No one could have told how old the Señora was. Her dark, shining eyes suggested a woman of twenty; the hard, embittered lines around the mouth a woman of sixty. Her husband, plump and bald, seemed to be a man in his fifties. As girls in South American countries were usually married to older men at the time, the Señora could well have been about thirty.

To the children playing in the hotel garden the two of them were romantic figures: refugees! In one of the many revolutions, the party of Señor Geraldo had been overthrown and his enemies in that unhappy land on the other side of the ocean were able to wield their power with unspeakable harshness and cruelty. That had happened five years before. And for five years the Señora and her husband had been living in Switzerland and waiting. Waiting for the day when they could return to their liberated homeland and when that homeland would once again live and breathe freely.

Señor Geraldo had settled down in Weggis. The Señora, in contrast, seemed to have no idea where she was living. Her dark eyes looked right through the people who passed by her and though she spoke English and French fluently, if anyone spoke to her, she understood not a word of what was said.

Señor Geraldo would probably have been happy to mix more with the other residents of the hotel; he would have enjoyed a game of cards from time to time, and he would have very much liked to make an occasional trip to the casino in Lucerne. But his wife would not let him leave her side. He had to sit with her and read to her from the many newspapers piled up on the table before him. The Señora had no interest in European politics. What did Europe matter to her? She could think only of her enslaved homeland, of the terrible things that were happening there. She did not notice the scent of the purple lilac blossoms; her nostrils were filled with the choking smell of homes set on fire; their leaping flames drew a red curtain between her and the blue, spring sky.

The Señor read to her, reported on the South American republic through lead articles and items of daily news. Now and again the Señora would smile, pull the knots of her netting tighter as if she wanted to draw the noose tighter around someone's neck, and ask the Señor to read a particular paragraph again.

Every disaster, every epidemic reported in the newspapers made her happy. She would pull her knots tighter, say "muerto," and smile. Every now and then she would point with her gleaming netting needle at an obituary notice and repeat it out loud. At such moments her face became beautiful, transfigured, like that of a blessed spirit that has seen the heavens.

She would put her netting aside, reach for a little diary, and write in, under the appropriate date, the name of the deceased enemy. She would laugh on days when she was able to write in more than one name and would show the little green leatherbound book to her husband: "Muerto, muerto, muerto."

For the Señora there was no more beautiful word in the whole wonderful language of her native land. One enemy had died. Or his son – a youngster who, if he had grown to manhood, would also have tortured their homeland and reduced it to slavery – had been killed in a serious riding accident. Now he could no longer do that. He lay stiff and dead. Muerto, muerto, muerto. And she smiled when she read the obituaries of the enemies' wives: they would bear no more children for the hated regime. Muerta, muerta, muerta. A house had collapsed, burying thirty workers under the rubble – renegades who had cheered as the enemy made his grand entry. Now they would cheer no more; now their dead mouths, which had betrayed the homeland, were stopped up with dust and plaster. Muerto, muerto, muerto. A ship had gone down; from its stern the new flag

of the old homeland had fluttered. The Señora tapped the table impatiently with her needle. She could not wait to hear how many had perished in the disaster. The captain – good; and the first officer – good; and twenty sailors – only twenty sailors? And the second officer had been saved along with the rest of the crew? The Señora wrinkled her brow: “Poor show,” she muttered to her husband. “What was God thinking of, allowing all of those to be saved?”

She reached for her netting again and pulled the knots tighter and tighter, as though she was tying a noose around the neck of one of those who had been saved and drawing it ever tighter.

“Yes,” Señor Geraldo said to an acquaintance one day. “She has been like that for five years now. At night she gets up, turns on the light, and re-reads the old newspapers from the first to the last page. She is afraid that I may not have reported all the deaths to her. And then she comes back to bed and whispers the names of the dead to herself. No she doesn’t need sleep. One or two hours are enough for her. At the crack of dawn, she wakes up and shakes me to awaken me also. She asks how long it will be before the newspaper comes. Every day she again believes that the front page will carry the news of the fall of the regime. And in the meantime, she contents herself with deaths and catastrophes; she collects them and reads them out to herself from her diary. As if to pray. Then she knots her netting. I have no idea how many pieces of netting she has stored in her trunks or how large they are. Yes, in her trunks. In the five years we have been here she has never unpacked her trunks. “What for?” she would ask. “Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow we could be going home. And it would be a shame to have to waste time packing.”

In a frame of springtime in Switzerland, blossoming fruit-trees, the blue waters of a lake, and a large, bright hall, I see before me the long forgotten image of the dark-eyed woman whose fingers work restlessly on her netting and on whose thin pale lips a smile forms from time to time as she whispers to herself “Muerto, muerto, muerto!”

“Die Senora,” *Die Zeitung* (London), 1 April 1941; *Zeitspiegel* (London), 8 June 1946; *Arbeiter-Zeitung* (Vienna), 18 February 1949.

## 7. Miss Brington

Every evening, when the residents of the boarding house, with unshakable optimism, tried to turn on the radio, the landlady appeared and, with a deep sigh, said: "Do give the machine a rest."

Miss Brington – no one knew her by her first name; she was one of those people from whom one gets the impression that in their entire lives no one ever called them by their first name, let alone by a friendly nickname – Miss Brington had raised the art of sighing to a level perhaps never attained by any other human being. Her scale of sighs embraced not just eight tones, but twenty-four at least. It began with an exhalation that wafted through the dining room like a gentle spring breeze whenever one of the residents asked for more bread, increased in volume and intensity with each new request, until, if someone reached for the knob on the radio, it became so strong, deep, and sustained that you were reminded of autumn gales blowing through the moonlit ruins of old castles on eerie nights.

Miss Brington was not unfriendly and she was not friendly. You could almost say that she simply was not. Something swept out the rooms and dusted, something cooked the meals in the kitchen no one was permitted to enter, something laid the table and cleared it afterwards, something served the food, something worked in the little house from morning to night – you could see hands, feet going up and down the stairs, a brown dress, and a yellow sweater – and the name of this something was Miss Brington. But what might lie hidden behind the expressionless face, whether Miss Brington had any idea of what went on around her, whether she could feel happy or angry, whether she liked people or hated them – *that* there was no way of knowing.

She seemed possessed by a single idea: the idea of rest. If the water heater broke down – which happened often – she would write on a slip of paper not, as other people would: "Do not turn on the water heater," but "Please give the water heater a rest." Even the broom, which she grudgingly

let people borrow, sometimes had a notice stuck to it: "Please give the broom a rest." And one Monday morning, after the residents had had more visitors than usual on the preceding Sunday, a slip of paper was found tied to the door knocker with a little piece of blue ribbon: "The door knocker needs a bit of rest."

Once and once only Miss Brington made a comment about the political situation. She stood in the garden and looked up into the bright sky in which gleaming barrage balloons floated like giant silver fish, uttered one of her middle-range sighs, and declared: "They ought to bring the barrage balloons in. After all, they have to get a bit of rest."

You were tempted at first to laugh at this endlessly repeated, hackneyed expression. But you soon came to see that it was the hole in the curtain behind which was concealed the inapprehensible, toiling, sighing something that was known publicly as Miss Brington. Through the hole you could glimpse the scene of a life which in fact had never been a proper life.

Thanks to a faded photograph marked with a date that hung in the dining room, you knew that Miss Brington's father had died when she was ten years old and that at that point she already owned the little house. A little house of one's own – the dream and pride of every family on King's Row. A little house that widow and daughter had to hold on to if they were not to slide down into the lower ranks of society where people have no home of their own and have to live in rented rooms.

Perhaps little Miss Brington learned to utter some of her lighter sighs when, instead of playing with her school friends, she had to stay home and help her working mother. Perhaps coming home from school as it was already getting dark and having to deliver the sewing her mother took in (the later the better; the neighbors don't have to know we need to earn money this way), perhaps that is what first gave her the idea that it would be nice to sit still and rest a while. Perhaps it was when she was scrubbing the outside steps that she first began to feel it would be good to give the wash-rag and the broom a rest, so that even they could enjoy a little peace and quiet after what, for a child, had been an over-full day.

And so life must have gone on. Times did not get easier. The mother aged quickly and the daughter was left with all the work. At first she rented out one room, then two, then three. But at least they still owned the house and, as night began to fall, could go into their own little garden and breathe in the fresh air. And that was worth all the sacrifices.

Doubtless the two women never spoke to each other. What was there

to say? They worked away side by side and each of them longed for night to come and with it, finally, rest and sleep. Possibly, for a while, night time was also a time when the young Miss Brington allowed her imagination to wander: other girls go dancing, gossip and laugh with each other, people fall in love with them and marry them... But, of course, other girls are not so constantly tired and do not carry the weight of a whole house on their shoulders. Perhaps there were nights when the young Miss Brington hated the house that deprived her of rest and happiness, but if so, it was likely to be an impotent hatred, the kind of hatred people feel for an invincible, all-powerful tyrant. And her stone tyrant made ever more demands on her. Her tyrant was often sick and in need of a great deal of care and attention. The roof needed to be repaired; the gutters had started to leak. All that cost money, lots of money. The rooms became shabby; the old furniture needed a rest too, and if it did not get it, became sullen and difficult, let its legs and arms break, and in anger spewed horsehair and kapok out of its cushions. And so it caused more work.

The war came. Miss Brington hardly noticed it. She had no relatives or friends to worry about. She only had her old mother, who was becoming meaner by the day, and the ageing, ever more demanding house.

She had become almost completely unaccustomed to speaking. As her mother was now stone deaf, it was pointless talking to her, and her lodgers appeared strange and incomprehensible to Miss Brington – noisy people who always wanted something and were never at rest, not even on a Sunday. It was better to communicate with them through sighs and little slips of paper. It was around this time that Miss Brington developed sighing into an art; around this time too, perhaps, that for the first time in many years a feeling was aroused in her: a feeling of compassion for things that are used every day, often enough every hour, and that – who knows? – were perhaps as weary as she. She was unhappy when someone forced the broom, which had already put in a morning's work, to sweep again in the afternoon. She was firmly convinced that the water heater had given up out of weariness and would return dutifully to work if it were granted just a few days' rest. As for the radio, it had to be protected from the heedless residents who kept wanting to turn it on.

She herself could not ask for protection, she herself could not give up working; but she could stretch out a helping hand to dumb, helpless things, and this capacity gave her something she had never had before: self-awareness and confidence. She – who in her entire life, had never had

enough money, who in her entire life had never been able to exercise her will on anything – had the power to grant rest to someone or something; she had the power to give the most precious gift she could imagine.

And so she lived on, a something that worked and sighed and, if only from time to time, quite rarely, smiled to herself when she thought of the day that house and garden, people and things would disappear and she would wake up in a more beautiful world and discover that an angel had tied a broad blue ribbon around her, to which was attached a slip of paper that said: “Please give Miss Brington a bit of rest. She has worked enough.”

“Miß Brington,” *Die Zeitung*, London, 10 November 1941, p. 3; *Zeitspiegel*, London, No. 23/24, 8 June 1946, p. 6; *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, Vienna, 30 July 1949, No. 176, p. 5.

Translator’s note:

This little story obviously reflects the author’s many years of familiarity with boarding houses. At the time of its publication it must have been especially meaningful to the readers of *Die Zeitung* – largely middle-class German and Austrian refugees in England, many of whom had had to settle in such boarding houses. In England, as is well known, the boarding house is a peculiarly drab and depressing institution.

At the same time, Zur Mühlen was clearly able to identify with the downtrodden, narrow-minded, deprived landlady. She too knew what it was to have to toil ceaselessly and she too transcended her own miseries to some extent by seeking to lighten the burdens born by others and placing her hopes in a better world to come.

## 8. We Have to Tell Them

By June the little girl was beginning to count the days until the vacation. At eight years of age, she had made the discovery that all days are not equally long. Toward the end of the holidays, they rush by like crazy, faster than horses, faster than cars – but just before the holidays they creep along like snails or like the old man who stood outside the Church on Sundays begging, and to whom the little girl was permitted to give a few pennies. The little girl spoke to her father about this curious discovery of hers and found it hard to believe him when he told her that all the days are of equal length and that it is only fear or longing that makes one hour stretch out to two, sometimes even three or, in contrast, makes the same hour shrink to half an hour or even just a quarter of an hour. She did understand about longing, however. Had she not been longing for months now for the day when she would be told: “Tomorrow we are leaving for Wognin.” Wognin was the family estate in Slovakia, but it might just as well have been called “Heaven” or “Paradise.” Perhaps it wasn’t so much the old castle and the property itself that she loved – though the paddock was every bit as beautiful as the Garden of Eden could have been. It was the little village itself, with its brightly painted houses, its little shops, and its weekly market. That was even more marvellous, alluring, and exciting. And this year everything was especially wonderful, for poor nanny had gone off to see her sick mother, and the little girl, who was now ten, was allowed to go into the village by herself and play with the village children.

Early one bright, sunny day she set out, neat and clean, in a white dress, beaming with joyful anticipation. But as she turned into the little street by the brook, she heard terrible screams. She ran in the direction the noise was coming from. Half an hour later, she was heading home, beaten up, panting, crying, red-faced, her white dress torn and dirty.

Her parents were still sitting at the breakfast table when she burst on to the veranda.

“What you look like!” her mother said sternly. “Go and get changed immediately.”

Her father, however, glanced at her little face and said, “Sit down, Nina. Tell us what happened.”

Still panting and sobbing, Nina struggled to get her breath back, and finally let out a string of unconnected words: “Jan and Hanus and Svata and miller Nedbal’s big son...”

“Yes?” her father asked gently. “What about them?”

“You’ve got to give them a hiding, father. Right away. Let’s go. You’ve got to give them a good hiding.”

“Why so?”

The little girl blew her nose. Her voice trembled. But it was with anger now.

“Do you know what they did? All four of them, such big boys, and Nedbar’s son is already a grown-up, all four of them jumped on little Heini – you know who I mean, father, Heini Neuwirth – and beat him up, four against one, and Heini is still so small, and then they threw stones at him and screamed *Zid* (Jew) at him...”

Nina’s mother wrinkled her forehead. “I keep telling you, Nina, you should not be playing with the brats from the village. That’s what happens. Just look at your dress...”

“Brutes,” her father said crossly. Then: “And what did you do, Nina?” he asked in a tense voice.

“I hit Jan a good clip round the ears,” said Nina. “He is the smallest of them. Then I yelled at them and threatened them. And they all ran away. They’re cowards into the bargain, the brutes.”

“Don’t use such common expressions, Nina,” her mother interjected reprovingly.

“But even father said... And anyway they *are* brutes. Four against one. All the stronger ones against one weak one. Come on, father. Let’s go and give them a good hiding.”

“We can’t do that, Nina.”

“But someone has to do something. There was no one on the street at the time. No one saw what those wicked boys did. Father...”

“Look, Nina, I can’t do anything about this,” said her father, and if it had not been so unthinkable, Nina might have thought he was embarrassed.

She reflected for a moment. “Someone has to do something.”

Her mother chimed in. “Don’t get mixed up in things that are none of

your business. And now go and change."

"Look, Nina, such things happen," her father said soothingly. "People don't know..."

"They don't know?" The bright summer's day that had so suddenly become dark and sad for Nina grew light again.

"Well, then, if they don't know about it, then they're not so bad. But we have to tell them."

Her father looked at her with a worried expression. "You have your work cut out for you, child."

"Go and change," her mother repeated.

Nina nodded and went, but she had no intention of changing. Beaten up and dirty, she ran back into the village in her torn dress. She would tell everybody what happened and everybody would be outraged and angry and the bad boys would be punished. If such things happened only because people did not know about them, it wouldn't be difficult to set matters right. Someone just had to tell them. And she would do it.

Her first stop was at the priest's. Nina didn't care for the young reverend who had come to the village after the good old priest died. He looked stern and mean. But he is a big man and everyone listens to him. The priest himself opened the door. Nina didn't even wait for him to ask her in. Still standing in the corridor, she recounted to him what had happened. "Reverend Father," she concluded, "you have to ex-com-muni-cate these boys!" And she thought of the Emperor Henry at Canossa, the subject of her last religious instruction period before the vacation. The priest wrinkled his forehead. "These things happen," he said testily. "There's no need to make such a fuss about a little Jew-boy."

Nina stared at him. Cold shivers suddenly ran down her back.

"You... you know that such things... You really know?"

"Naturally. There's absolutely no reason for you to get so worked up." Nina noticed that the priest no longer used the familiar "du" form with her, as he had in the past. He was speaking to her now as he would to an adult who had displeased him. Her little face turned pale and hard. "You have always known that such things happen – among us, in our village?"

"I am busy right now. I have no time," the priest replied.

"No time! But that is like... like the people who passed by until the Good Samaritan came along."

The priest's face became red with anger.

"I will report you to your father," he said and pushed Nina out the door.

She walked on slowly. She felt as though someone had struck her a blow on the head. He knows about it, our priest knows about it, and he doesn't do anything!

She clenched her little hands into fists. He is a wicked man. He will go to hell. Or at least be sent to purgatory for a thousand years. And when he dies, I will not pray for his soul.

Somewhat consoled by those thoughts, she went to the next house to tell the people what had happened. She went from one house where she knew the people to another. She pleaded, then she got angry, then desperate. She, who had always loved everyone, began to hate the people in the village. Everybody knew, it seemed, and no one did anything.

The sun stood high in the heavens. The air shimmered from the heat. Nina dragged herself along, her weary feet sending up little clouds of fine dust. Now she had stopped at the home of everyone she knew. So many houses, she thought, so many people, and they all know, and no one does anything, no one. What kind of a world is this? Father was wrong about people not knowing. But father himself won't do anything.

She struggled slowly, very slowly homewards. They will still be sitting at their breakfast as though nothing has happened, she thought, utterly bewildered. And all mother could speak of was my dress. I don't want to go home.

All of a sudden, everything appeared strange to her. And then she had an insight. It was so terrible that she sank down on the edge of a ditch, as though she had been struck by a blow, and held her head in her hands. If that's the way it is everywhere, all over the world, if injustice happens everywhere and everyone knows and no one does anything... no one...

The sun shone brightly, spreading its warmth over the land; the sky was clear and blue; all around there was beauty and peace. At the edge of a ditch a little girl sat and stared into a black, impenetrable night of horror. Tears streamed down her cheeks as, full of despair and apprehension, she kept repeating amid sobs: "They all know about it, they all know about it."

"Man muß es ihnen sagen," *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, Vienna, 12 December 1948, p. 5. For comment on this story, see Gossman, "The Red Countess: Four Stories," *Common Knowledge*, 15 (2009), pp. 82-91.

## 9. Painted on Ivory

October had turned the leaves yellow and red. In the afternoon sun their colours glowed brightly. The approaching evening had sent a gentle wind ahead as its messenger. Yellow and red leaves were swept into the pond where they sailed for a while over the grey water, like tiny boats, until they sank.

Jane Austen stood by the pond and observed the little performance. How often she had done that in the seven years since 1809 when the three of them, the widow and her orphaned daughters – Jane, her two years older sister Cassandra, and their mother – had moved from Bath to the country at Chawton House.

Strange that she was affected for the first time, today, by the melancholy of autumn. Until now autumn had been only a time of transition to Chawton's cosy winter warmth, which in its turn held out the promise of spring. Today, however, she felt a leave-taking in the air and she shivered slightly. But only for a moment. Impatiently she threw back her head with its dark curls and straightened her tall slim body. A smile formed on her small mouth and danced in her hazel eyes as she chided herself for having yielded to *sentimentality*. For there was nothing she hated so much as exaggerated feelings. She had not tolerated them in any of the heroines of her novels. All the young females in her books were complete mistresses of their hearts.

As she often did, she thought of these figures as if they were living creatures. Among them were several of whom she was fonder than of friends and relatives – Cassandra, the cleverest and best of sisters, excepted. Above all, Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*. She had never been able to forgive anyone for not loving Elizabeth. Perhaps because there was a good deal of herself in Elizabeth – the keen eye for human weaknesses, the energy, the wit. She remembered exactly how she had written the book as a twenty-one year old in her first, beloved home, Steventon Rectory, where her father

had been rector. It had come out three years ago in 1813; anonymously, of course, as a *Novel by a Lady*.

Could there have been a finer pseudonym for her? Were not the “lady” and the “gentleman” her ideal – people with good manners, a solid education and culture, like her father, and a select social circle. That circle might be a trifle narrow perhaps, but it was harmonious. Only the ridiculous traits of a few arrogant aristocrats and the naïve snobbery of a small number of social climbers heightened its colour somewhat. How well she knew those people. She had spent her entire life among them. Was it not natural that they figured in all her books?

Now the *Big House* on the hillside [Chawton House – L.G.] was turning red in the light of the setting sun. Even the lower lying church was touched by its wine-dark rays. On the other side of the valley the small, thickly wooded hill could be seen fading into the darkness, and the breeze had become cooler.

Jane strode through the carefully tended garden into the house. She entered the large living-room, where her mother and Cassandra were already waiting for her. Jane loved this room, she loved the walled-up window that had once looked out on to the street and was now transformed into a bookcase. Perhaps, she reflected – and her own thought startled her – perhaps in my books too I always walled up the window opening on to the street. The street means the larger world out there with its noise, its loud pleasures, its unconcealed tragedies. It means people and more people, people who are different from me, people passionate about politics – and I have always hated politics. It means the tragic condition of poverty in the big cities, about which I know nothing and want to know nothing – though I have never neglected our own worthy, well brought up poor. There was one time when the street reached right into our lives. That was years ago when my cousin Elizabeth’s husband was guillotined in France. But that was so far away and so much less real than my books or than a malicious smile espied in company, or a clever turn of phrase, or a gesture revealing a person’s whole character. Yes, even tragedy once came quite close – that was in 1805 – through my brother Frank who was serving in the Navy. In one of his letters he described Nelson’s death at Trafalgar which he had witnessed personally. How much better it is to fill up the window that looks out on to the street with books and to see out only through the other window on to the garden, on to lawns and trees and on to the high wood fence that cuts us off from others, on to the hedge of hornbeam with

its delicate leaves...

She gave her sister a smile and walked over to her writing desk. From the drawer she pulled out some small loose sheets of paper, so small they could easily be hidden if company came, sat down, and began to write. She loved working quietly in the large, handsome room, she loved to look up and see Cassandra's gentle gaze turned on her, and the still sturdy figure of their mother, who on days when she had spent the morning working in the garden, often dozed off on the sofa in the twilight hour. These two people, along with her brothers and their children, and her work, made up her world.

But her books too meant something different to her than to most women writers. She smiled as she thought of Fanny Burney, who was so ambitious and set such store by the judgment of others, and of that dreadful Madame de Stael whose heroines revealed their feelings so shamelessly and seemed to know of nothing but love – not a tender love respectful of the boundaries that preserve a certain distance between people, but a wild, vulgar, at times ridiculous passion. In London once, when the secret of the "Lady" who had written *Pride and Prejudice* was no longer a secret, an attempt had been made to bring her together with Madame de Stael. But she had explained that she could not accept an invitation to a house where she was to be welcomed, not as Jane Austen, but as the author of *Pride and Prejudice*. Besides, Madame de Stael had said that Miss Austen's books were "commonplace."

She began to write, quickly, as was her manner. Her energetic yet fine handwriting filled one loose sheet of paper after another, until darkness forced her to stop.

Cassandra, who sensed all the moods of her sister, did not hurry to light the lamps. She knew that Jane continued to spin out her stories in the semi-darkness and that she was not to be disturbed by a single spoken word.

Today, however, Jane's thoughts were not about the new novel *Persuasion*, on which she had been working for months. Something or other was leading her to reflect on her own life. What was it exactly? Normally, for her, the past was truly past, and she was not especially interested in her own person. Impatiently she straightened the little cap she wore. (Years ago – far too soon, according to their mother – she and Cassandra had decided to cover their curls with the headgear of elderly women.) She hated every kind of obscurity, in words as in feelings. In her books too every word had to be the *mot juste*, the only right one. She loved words, and she loved an orderly, clear, rather sober style, a style that – so it seemed to her – best reflected life,

at least the life of her caste. Now she was tormented by the question why, today, as she stood at the pond, she had for the first time felt the sadness of autumn, why, as she thought about her books, she had suddenly felt a desire to defend them – not in the eyes of others, but in her own. She wrinkled her forehead and reflected strenuously. Everything was caused by something and until that something had been identified, one was obliged to wander around in a fog and could not find one's way into the bright, somewhat cold, somewhat harsh light of day that, for her, was the only proper light. Why?... Her sister, only a shadowy outline in the darkness, looked over toward her, and all at once she knew what the something was. This morning, in the bedroom they shared, while Cassandra was combing her hair, she had seen, for the first time, a white strand in the dark locks, and had thought, slightly shocked: Cassy is getting old; we are both getting old. Afterwards she had laughed at her own silliness: old at forty and forty-two! How much time do we still have, how much time do I still have to write my beloved books?

Now this thought occurred to her again and she smiled at her own silly sentimentality. I have written only five novels so far! Like a child, she enumerated them on the fingers of her left hand: *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*. The smile on her finely shaped features grew broader. Dear, good Mrs. Radcliffe had forgiven her the parody of her famous book *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and had even laughed at it herself. It had been too tempting to make a fool of those popular horror stories with their dark dungeons, spirits, murders, cruel villains and supernaturally virtuous heroes and heroines. Real life was something altogether different, something quiet and peaceful. Even death was not too frightening when one had faith in an afterlife.

The index finger of Jane Austen's right hand still rested on the palm of her left hand. Suddenly she felt how skinny it was. She raised her hand and held it in front of her face, but it was too dark to make anything out and now she grasped one hand with the other a little more vigorously, a little more impatiently than was her wont. Yes, her hand is skinny, and her round face has become long and narrow. That she could see in the mirror. She always feels tired now and rather often she is visited by pains that she hides from her mother and Cassandra...

Time – to write more books... Who knows how much time has been granted to us? It occurred to her that Cassandra, to whom she read each

new chapter aloud, had said: "I don't know what it is, Jane, but this book is different. There are none of your dear little malicious comments and gestures. Your heroine, Anne Elliot, strikes me as the most interesting of your female characters, she is gentler, more sensitive..." "Please, Cassy," she had interrupted her sister. "I beg you, don't tell me that Anne is sentimental." "No, but somehow, I'm not sure how, she is more connected to life out there than your other heroines." "I don't understand you. Elizabeth and Elinor and Emma also fall in love, are loved, and get married. Isn't that what happens to everyone?" Cassandra had not answered and had left the room almost in anger. Now as Jane stared at the loose sheets of paper lying in front of her, she admitted that her sister had been right. But she had been right too, for it was the first time that she had allowed feeling to have the leading role in one of her books. Perhaps the world did not consist only of country gentry, middle-class landowners, vicars, and their daughters. Perhaps, after all, there was something else, something that had remained foreign to her.

"Cassy," she called out in the darkness, "do you know what my books are? Little ivory pieces, two inches high, painted with such a thin brush that all my work, in the end, has only a quite slight effect."

"Jane," Cassy cried out in shock. "What has got into you? What are you thinking of?"

"I don't know myself. Perhaps it is better to paint large pictures. Pictures that encompass everything. But I wasn't capable of that. I could only portray the world I knew. Perhaps I was wrong not to want to get to know the other world."

"I don't know what you mean, Jane," Cassandra said uncomprehendingly. Jane Austen laughed, softly, gently, as a lady should laugh.

"Forget about it, Cassy. It was just a thought. I've already chased it away. Light the lamps. As you well know, darkness confuses people and makes them sentimental. Do light the lamps please, quickly."

"Auf Elfenbein gemalt," *Die Zeit* (Vienna), 15 December 1948.

Translator's note:

Zur Mühlen's interest in and knowledge of Jane Austen were unusual in the German-speaking world. Until fairly recently, Austen's work was

virtually unread and untranslated in Germany. Even academic studies of it by German scholars of English literature were extremely rare.<sup>1</sup> Zur Mühlen may have been introduced to Austen by her Anglo-Irish grandmother, Isabella Louisa Blacker, or she may have discovered her during her years of exile in England. For obvious reasons, she must have been intrigued by Austen's status as a woman writer whose class and gender identity was in conflict with her literary ambition and by the way she chose to resolve that conflict. But she may also have felt that she shared with Austen a peculiarly feminine way of attending to speech, gesture, and other characteristics of class and individual personality, as well as to the complexity of human relations in general. In addition, her fictional portrait of Jane Austen provided an opportunity for reflecting on the role and responsibility of the writer. Her late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century English predecessor is presented as having deliberately chosen to restrict herself, for the sake of her art, to the portrayal of the world she knew well and never left – in marked contrast to Zur Mühlen's own decision to break out of her world in order to address a wide and varied audience on the pressing political and social issues of her time. What is an author's obligation? Should she write finely observed, literary pieces on domestic themes, as Zur Mühlen with her novel *Der Riesenrad* had demonstrated she was quite capable of doing, or should she look out on to "the street, with its noise, its loud pleasures and its unconcealed tragedies" – which to Zur Mühlen had meant writing about pressing social and political problems, in particular the dangers of National Socialism – and get her readers to do likewise? Zur Mühlen's choice was never in doubt. But she was not unaware of the sacrifices, literary as well as pecuniary, that her choice entailed. Finally, despite her political commitment, Zur Mühlen, who had struggled with ill health for most of her life, was acutely conscious of the fragility of existence and, in general, of the transitoriness of everything. In this feuilleton she projects that consciousness, not implausibly, on to her heroine. Apparently her knowledge of Austen's biography extended to the illness of which Austen began to be aware when she was about forty, not long after she had begun work on *Persuasion*, and which carried her off less than two years later. In Zur Mühlen's autobiographical memoir, *Ende und Anfang*, written and published in 1929, when she was in her mid-forties, there is a short passage that is quite similar in tone to the tone set at the very opening of the feuilleton. It evokes the feeling of melancholy that overcame the future writer as she watched darkness gathering over the small town of Gmunden in Austria, where, in the company of her beloved grandmother, she spent her happiest childhood years:

I loved our mountain, the pride of the little town, rising up on the opposite shore

<sup>1</sup> See Annika Bautz, "The Reception of Jane Austen in Germany," in *The Reception of Jane Austen in Europe*, ed. Anthony Mandal and Brian Southam (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), pp. 93-116. Zur Mühlen's feuilleton is not mentioned in this otherwise well documented article.

of the lake. On fine summer evenings the whole mass of stone turned pink, like the finest marble, and then, when it was already dusk all around, the Traunstein (as our mountain was called) shone forth out of the shadows like an undying flame. Gradually, however, it paled and turned cold and dead, and everything lost life and became suddenly old and joyless. At that moment, without knowing why, I felt a deep sadness. A day was dead, a day of childhood was irrevocably gone.

The fact that this little feuilleton was published in the Vienna *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, the socialist newspaper with which she had long been associated, on the occasion of her own 65<sup>th</sup> birthday is an indication of how keen and personal Zur Mühlen's interest in Austen was.

## 10. The Sparrow

Quarrel and disagreement ruled in the Sparrow family. Mother Sparrow squatted in her nest all day and Father Sparrow swore and grumbled and found fault with everything. The family that had once been so happy was completely changed. And for all this misery the youngest Sparrow was to blame. One evening at supper he had declared briefly and boldly, "I am not going to school any more. I am not putting up any more with all the insults I receive. I am tired of our whole life here. I want to go out into the world." He stuck up his bill cheekily and gave his parents a defiant look.

Mother Sparrow was so shocked that all her feathers stood up. She stared helplessly at her ill-mannered son, and all she could do was to say weakly, "Peep, peep." But Father Sparrow opened his beak so wide in horror that the long worm he had been about to eat fell out of it and slithered away as fast as it could. This made Father Sparrow even angrier. Now, on top of everything else, his supper had got away. Father Sparrow was a man of action. This time too, as in the past, he bent down and beat his son in the face with his sharp beak.

Sparrow screamed more defiantly than ever, "I won't stay here any longer. I've had enough. I'm going out into the world."

Then Mother Sparrow found her voice again and said tearfully, "You wicked child! Is that how you thank your parents for the love they have given you! Have we not brought you up well and provided you with everything? You are the first sparrow in our village to attend Professor Swallow's school and learn how to build artistic nests. You move in the best circles. You mix with the Swallows, the Starlings, and the Yellow-bills. And this is how you repay us!"

"I don't care a straw about the best circles," Sparrow replied rudely. And he opened his beak and whistled defiantly, "Tweet, tweet!"

"No other sparrow is studying for such a respectable profession," piped Mother Sparrow despairingly.

Then Young Sparrow began to make such a rumpus that the whole nest

shook. "A respectable profession, yes, truly a beautiful profession. Building nests for others to live in. Slaving in the heat of the sun, carrying straws from all over, weaving them together, making sure that everything is just perfect – only to have the fine ladies and gentlemen move in and throw me a little worm for my wages, barely big enough for a decent meal. Fine people, indeed! The Swallows, always dressed up in their frock-coats; the Yellow-bills showing off all their gold. And the arrogance and scorn they treat us with! A common labourer, they call me contemptuously. I have had enough of it. I am as good as they are, and maybe better."

Mother Sparrow shrank back in horror, but Father Sparrow puffed himself up until he nearly burst and thundered, "Be silent, you rogue, you little scoundrel. You talk like a Communist. You forget that I am Chairman of the Sparrow Village Council. My son may not rebel against the established order."

"Yes," groaned Mother Sparrow, "and what if the neighbours were to hear you! How dreadful!" Young Sparrow laughed shamelessly, seated himself on the edge of the nest and whistled a revolutionary song.

Father Sparrow rose hastily and muttered in an undertone to his wife, "See to that young fool and get him to behave. I have to go now. There is a meeting of the Choral Society." He flew away without one look at his naughty son.

Mother Sparrow sighed deeply and asked in a plaintive voice, "Now what is it you really want?"

Young Sparrow came closer, nestled against his mother and said with a sweet smile, "I want to go away, little Mother, far away. To foreign lands where it is always summer."

"But Son of my Heart, you know that even the stupid children of humans are taught in their schools that the sparrow is not a migratory bird."

"What is that to me? I can't stand it here any longer. I am tired of always seeing the same things: the old church steeple in the distance, the farmhouse and the dung-hill right here in front of our noses. No, I want to go away, far away."

At that he spread out his wings and pushed himself head first out of the nest into space. It seemed very dangerous, but his wings carried him safely through the air.

Still, Young Sparrow was by no means as joyous and light-hearted as he seemed. His parents' words had raised all sorts of doubts in his mind. "Mother was really right," he said to himself. "The sparrow is not a

migratory bird. No one has ever heard of a sparrow flying across the great ocean and going to distant lands. But why," he asked himself, with defiant courage, "shouldn't I be the first one to do this? Some one always has to be the first. If my venture succeeds I will have proved to the entire sparrow people that they don't have to freeze and starve in the winter-time, but can move to warm countries and live well there. To be sure, the ocean..." Young Sparrow became disheartened. He remembered what his teacher, Swallow the master builder, had once told him about the great, wild stretch of boundless water with its angry, foaming waves that you had to fly over day after day. If the strength of your wings failed, you plunged down and were lost. You were swallowed up by the waves.

Beset by these thoughts, Young Sparrow almost wanted to give up the idea. He felt completely deflated and began to tremble. Then suddenly he thought how many wretched sparrows had died of hunger and cold in past hard winters.

"No, no," he said to himself. I mustn't be so cowardly. This is not just about me. It's about all my brother sparrows, about all the future generations of Sparrows who will be around when I am long dead. If I can help them to a happier life, it will be worth every effort and every sacrifice."

And brave Young Sparrow resolved to strike out the very next day.

He spent that night in his parents' nest, huddled close to his mother, and wept a little in secret, because it was hard for him to leave her. Father Sparrow got home late and quite drunk from the Choral Society meeting, threw himself with such force on his bed that it creaked noisily, and immediately fell asleep.

The grey-white sky began to turn rosy. Morning came flying in on the wings of the wind and brought light to the world. Young Sparrow awoke, looked for the last time at his sleeping parents, and flew away. He knew which direction to fly in, for he remembered the stories that the swallows had told. Now he flew exactly that way.

The sun climbed higher into the heavens, it became hotter and hotter, and poor Sparrow could scarcely breathe. His wings were so sore that he could hardly lift them. Still, he flew on. He had resolved not to rest until the shades of night fell on the earth.

Never had Young Sparrow lived through such a long day. In vain his bright little eyes explored the heavens; the great golden sphere of the sun shone brightly and would not go down.

"I was a fool," thought Sparrow. "At this moment I might be sitting

comfortably at home in our nest, or bathing in the big puddle by the cherry-tree. Oh, how pleasant it would be to bathe. Even the ocean would not be too big for me right now.”

Still, he did not lose heart but flew steadily on. True, he was now flying very slowly. Every beat of his wings caused him terrible pain. He began to hate the sun, the merciless red sphere that would not go down. To give himself courage he made up a little song, sang it very softly, and flapped his weary wings in time to its rhythm.

My cause is the cause of my brothers,  
My strength must save them all;  
If I fail, I do wrong to the others,  
And their chains will never fall.

At last, at long last, great black shadows fell upon the earth. A refreshing breeze came flying in, coolly fanning Sparrow, who was very weary, and bearing him gently along on its mighty wings.

As the sun went down behind a blue hill, Sparrow alighted, utterly exhausted, on a large meadow. He lay panting in the tall grass. The soft chirping of the crickets lulled him to sleep; his eyes closed.

Rough, loud voices, human voices, awakened him. He peeked out through the tall blades of grass and saw two ragged, dust-covered men seated under a knotty old nut-tree. One of them was pulling his torn boots off and, looking woefully at his blistered feet, said: “I can’t go on any more. I have to rest for a day.”

“Just another half hour,” the other man said comfortingly. “Just to the next railroad station. There we will hide in a freight car and ride until morning. Then it will not be far to the sea.”

“All right, then,” the first man mumbled grumpily. “But I can’t go a step further than that today.” Slowly he pulled his boots on again.

Young Sparrow had listened attentively to their words. “So humans get tired too,” he thought, “and then they ride. I don’t know what that means, but I know that you don’t tire yourself out that way. If humans ride, why shouldn’t sparrows ride too?” He decided to follow the two men and not to let them out of his sight. As they left soon after, he flew after them.

They arrived at a house. On the ground in front of it stretched two gleaming ribbons. Now night had really come. Everything was hidden in darkness. Only the stars shone faintly in the sky. Sparrow stayed near the two men and waited.

Suddenly something dreadful happened. Through the darkness a

gigantic black beast came rattling along, its red eyes shining so brightly that you could see them from a great distance. It puffed and panted, and the earth shook under it. As it came near, it let out a frightful shriek. Then suddenly it stopped. Clouds of smoke poured from its long black nose.

Sparrow was astonished that neither of the two men, nor the other humans who were there seemed to be afraid of the monster. On the contrary, they ran up to it and disappeared into its maw. Then Sparrow noticed that the monster pulled a large number of little black houses behind it. He saw the two men sneak into one of those houses and flew on to the roof of the same house. Scarcely had he settled down when the monster again began to puff and pant and started to move.

Poor Sparrow thought he would die of fright. The monster rattled along at such speed that the little bird could neither hear nor see. At home he had often flown with the wind for the fun of it and had enjoyed the swift motion. But this was altogether different. A fearful wind storm beat on him and tried to blow him off the roof. He made himself as small as he could, clung on tightly, trembling all over, and was convinced that his last hour had come. If humans call this rest, they surely are strange creatures. It is true that, though he could see over all the roofs, he could not see a single human on any of them. Perhaps it is not so terrible where the people are, as it is here. He was a clever Sparrow and when the monster stopped again to catch its breath, he flew down from the roof of the house and had a look at it from the front. The door was not quite closed. Sparrow squeezed through the crack, and entered a dark room piled high with crates. He squatted on one of them and waited to see what would happen.

The monster began to run again. Sparrow laughed with joy; he had found the right thing to do. He sat there at rest and the monster had to slave to carry him along. So this is what humans call "riding." Evidently, humans were not as stupid as he thought.

The countless feet of the monster pounded over the earth singing a rattling, rumbling, monotonous song. To Sparrow the words seemed to be: "Into the distance! Into the distance!" For a while he listened to the song, then he fell asleep.

He must have slept for a long time. When he awoke, the sun was high in the sky and its rays came through the narrow open crack in the door into the dark room. Sparrow saw his two acquaintances crouching on the floor, hidden between two tall crates. They seemed to be in good humour, chatting with one another and laughing.

"We have travelled a good part of our way without trouble," said the older one. "Now we only have to walk one more day and ride another night. Then we will have reached the ocean."

"How long will we have to swim?"

"About five days."

Terror seized Sparrow. For five long days he would have to swim over the endless waters. For five long days he would not be able to rest if he was not to sink under the waves. How would he be able to hold out? He began to reflect anxiously. Could humans swim for so long in the water? He had seen boys bathing in the village pond, but they would come out of the water in a short time and none of them ever remained in it all day long. Perhaps there were also tamed monsters that carried humans over the water. Again he decided not to leave the two humans' side and to do everything they did.

When the two men jumped unnoticed off the freight car at a busy railroad station, Sparrow followed them. He flew very close to them. He felt that they were his friends and that as long as he stayed with them nothing would happen to him.

All day long the men walked, through fields and meadows, through little villages with funny pointed church steeples. The younger of the two men limped. He could only walk slowly. This pleased Sparrow, for it meant that he did not have to hurry but could fly along at a comfortable speed. When the men stopped, Sparrow followed their example, using the time to look for food, as the long journey had made him unusually hungry. He also chatted with a few foreign birds, all of whom advised him not to continue his dangerous journey. The migratory birds he spoke to looked him over scornfully. "Do you think you can do the same as high class people like us?" they said with a sneer. "Travelling, seeing the world, spending the winter in warm climates – that is not for common people."

An old blackbird minister, black-frosted and solemn, delivered a sermon to him from a high branch. "We must obey God's commandments. God has ordained that sparrows must spend the winter in the north."

"If your God has ordained that our entire people is to be destroyed by cold and hunger and that only the upper classes, the Capitalists, like the Swallows and the Starlings, can escape the harsh winter, I don't want to know anything about him!" cried Sparrow, and his feathers bristled up in anger.

The old blackbird minister primped his shining feathers with his bill and muttered something unintelligible. But Sparrow was sad. "How

cruel we birds are to one another," he thought to himself. "I am trying to do something that will be helpful to all, and I am just laughed at. Can't anybody understand me?"

"Yes, I can, I can!" called a sweet voice from a great height, and a young lark shot down, swift as lightning, and alighted by the side of the despondent Sparrow. "I understand you. Everybody jeers at me too because I don't fly close to the earth as they do, but always try to soar higher and higher into the blue heavens. Do not be downcast, dear brother, you will reach your goal."

The young lark flew close to Sparrow, looked at him and said: "Fly a little for me, brother, so that I can see how strong your wings are."

Sparrow flew up, hovering over the lark. As he returned, she gave him a sad look and said earnestly: "Your wings cannot carry you over the great ocean, my poor friend. But you must not give up on that account. You must do as humans do. They cannot fly at all, and yet they travel all over the world. They have invented a kind of house that swims over the water. They call it a ship. You must find a ship..."

Sparrow did not wait to hear the rest. The two men had left unnoticed while the Lark was speaking and now Sparrow saw them in the distance like two dark spots. Frightened, he cried out: "My two humans have left me," and he flew after them as fast as he could.

When it grew dark the men once again sneaked into a freight train. Sparrow followed them and slept all night while the black monster again carried him over hills and mountains, past lakes and streams.

When dawn broke, the two men crept out of the train and Sparrow flew after them. They walked for a little while and then Sparrow saw an immense body of water that stretched before him. This blue-grey expanse of water extended infinitely outwards, far beyond the range of his vision, while terrifying high, wild, white-capped waves beat the shore.

So this was the ocean! Never had Sparrow felt so small and helpless as at the sight of this dreadful water. What was he in comparison? A poor helpless little bird, a tiny, anonymous something. From his little breast he heaved deep sighs, and tears rolled down from his bright little eyes. "If I were only safe at home, in our snug little nest," he moaned. "If only I could creep under Mother's wings as I used to do when I was small."

The waves roared eerily, threateningly; the white foam flew upwards. But the two men walked unconcerned along the damp, sandy beach. They seemed to have no fear at all of the raging sea as it lashed the shore. With

beating heart, Sparrow followed them. And then he saw an astonishing sight. In a great bay strange things were tossing about. They looked partly like houses, with tiny windows and tall chimneys, from which came a stream of heavy grey smoke, and partly like a forest in which bare trees without branches seemed to grow. Although these trees bore neither fruit nor leaves, Sparrow was delighted to see them. They seemed familiar. He began to feel at home. But how strange it was that these houses with the tall trees on them were on water and were being tossed up and down by the waves. Suddenly Sparrow remembered the words of the lark. "Humans call these houses that swim on the water 'ships.'" So these were ships! On one of these tossing, swimming houses he would travel to warm lands.

But which should he choose?

It occurred to him that at home it was the largest trees that were best able to withstand the wind. Probably the same was true of ships, and so he must choose the largest.

His two friends walked towards a small ship. Sparrow piped "Farewell! Farewell!" several times, but they did not hear him.

Sparrow flew on to an immense ship from whose chimneys great clouds of grey smoke were streaming, and hid himself high up at the top of one of the leafless trees.

What noise and activity there was below. Countless humans ran hither and thither, calling and shouting to one another; something rattled, something clattered, the great chimneys let out a loud shriek. A bridge that connected the ship with the land flew up into the air, then fell down with a bang into the ship. The ship started on its journey. Slowly, gravely, it cut through the water bubbling up on either side. The large house with the leafless trees, the little bird's new home, swam away from the land.

All the noise and the hurrying and scurrying had left Sparrow in a state of great confusion. But another terrible fright was in store for him. Suddenly a young fellow climbed up his tree. Sparrow was convinced that he had come to capture him. But the fellow did not seem to notice him and after a while climbed back down. As it grew dark, the ship became quiet and only the sound of the waves could be heard. Sparrow flew down from his tree and sat down on the ground, where he soon fell asleep.

When he awoke in the morning, he thought he would die of fright. The land had disappeared. Wherever he looked, he saw only water. Great grey waves rolled sluggishly against the ship, causing it to sway slightly, as a gentle wind shakes the nests in the trees. Not a tree, not a shrub, not a

flower was to be seen anywhere. The ship swam all alone on the boundless ocean.

Poor Sparrow felt quite lonely and abandoned. "If I could just find another bird, any bird," he sighed. "Even if it were a haughty swallow or a strict blackbird. I could at least speak with someone who knows my world and speaks my language." Once again, all his courage deserted him and he began to weep bitterly.

"Who are you?" suddenly asked a thin, piping voice, and when Sparrow looked up he beheld a little mouse standing before him and staring at him with large round eyes.

Sparrow was happy, for he was acquainted with mice at home. He bent down and politely answered the mouse's questions.

"You are a brave sparrow," she said, after she had heard his story. "I bid you welcome to my ship."

"To your ship?" exclaimed Sparrow. "I thought the ship belonged to the humans."

"That is what the humans think too," the mouse replied sharply. "But don't you know that humans always think everything belongs to them?"

"That is true. The farmer at home also thought that the cherry-tree was his, and yet it is quite obvious that the cherry-tree was made for us sparrows."

While they were conversing, a very old mouse came over and began to speak. "Not all humans believe that everything belongs to them," she said in a schoolmistressly tone. "There are also humans who do not possess anything. You can see that on this ship. On the upper decks people live in large, beautifully appointed, airy rooms, and eat all day long. My mouth waters when I smell the rich dishes that are set before them."

"But down below people are so crowded together that they can hardly find a space to lie down in at night, and many have nothing to eat on the whole journey but the dry bread that they brought along with them. That idiotic expression, 'my ship,' that too you learned from humans," she said, scolding the little mouse. "You know that among us everything is shared in common. Don't let me hear such words from you again."

"Forgive me, grandmother," the young mouse begged.

"You are a stranger here," said the grandmother mouse to Sparrow. "We will try to help you to survive the long journey. I advise you not to fly to the rich people. They will play with you for a day or two, and then forget you. The rich believe that everything in the world is there to serve and please

them. To be sure, you will only find a few breadcrumbs among the poor on the lower decks, but these humans will be kind to you, because they know what it is like to be a poor creature who has nothing."

Sparrow followed the advice of the wise grandmother mouse and soon realized that she had spoken truthfully. The small children were delighted with him and they saved breadcrumbs for him from the few that were provided for their own little mouths. And as they were children, they understood Sparrow's language and chatted with him. In this way, Sparrow heard many very sad stories. The children told of need and misery, they told how hard their parents had to work and how, even so, there was often nothing to eat in the house. Our good-hearted Sparrow felt very sad when he heard about this. "There must also be a beautiful land for humans, where conditions are good and they do not have to be cold and go hungry," he said to his little friends.

"Perhaps," said a pale little girl. "But we have not yet found the way to it."

"When I am big," declared a dark-haired little boy, "I will go away in search of that land. And when I find it, I will lead all poor, deprived humans to it."

The two mice also visited Sparrow often. They always came towards evening, when everything was quiet.

And so quite a long time passed, until one day Sparrow saw land in the distance, with houses and trees, and knew that he had now reached his goal.

The grey ocean had become quite blue and gleamed in the sunshine. It was very hot, and grandmother mouse said that this was the land where there is no winter.

When the ship docked, Sparrow tenderly took leave of his friends and flew ashore to inspect his new home.

All the humans had brown faces and wore strange clothes. The faces of the women were covered, so that only their large black eyes could be seen. He also saw funny animals that walked on four long legs and had a great hump on their backs. Even the trees were different from those at home. Some had long pointed leaves and sweet, brown fruit that tasted delicious to Sparrow. There was plenty to eat. Here no sparrow would have to suffer hunger, and snow and cold were unknown.

"Is this not also the right country for poor humans?" Sparrow wondered. But then he saw that in this sunny land too there were rich and poor, that

a few went richly clothed, while others wore rags, that a few lazy folk rode in handsome carriages, while others groaned under heavy burdens. And he thought, "It is much easier to find a sparrow paradise than a land where all humans live well." This pained him, because on his journey he had come to like humans. "But how strange this is," he thought in amazement. "Humans can tame wild monsters so that they will carry them all over, they know how to build houses that swim on the water, and yet they are poor and destitute and let a few greedy scoundrels take everything away from them."

Now that he had reached the warm country, Sparrow rested from his dangerous and wearisome journey, flew about lazily, and spent each night in a different tree.

One day he came to a beautiful stream and flew along its course. He came to a very great plain. At first he thought he had reached the ocean again, but then he saw that it was covered with fine yellow sand. In the distance he saw something rising out of the sand that looked like a monstrous animal. Out of curiosity he flew closer to it and realized that it was a gigantic creature with the head of a human and two huge paws. It was made of grey-brown stone and was partly covered with sand.

The ugly animal lay quite still and grinned evilly. Sparrow bowed anxiously: would the beast try to eat him in the end? But no, it graciously acknowledged his greeting and said: "I have been lying here for thousands of years, yet I have never seen a bird like you. Who are you? What are you doing here?"

Sparrow told his story and the great beast listened patiently. Then the little bird asked humbly: "Will you now tell me who you are? We have no animals like you at home."

The great beast laughed and replied: "Humans call me the Sphinx. I am so old that I have lost count of my age. I have seen everything, know everything."

"In my country the owls also say that," was Sparrow's pert response.

The Sphinx looked at him angrily. "The owl is a conceited braggart!" it exclaimed testily.

Sparrow was alarmed. "Forgive me!" he stammered. "I did not wish to offend you. " You also look much older than the owl."

"Indeed I am. I count my years only by the thousands."

"How much you must have seen!" cried Sparrow.

The Sphinx opened her gigantic mouth in such a huge yawn that the

sand flew about her as though a whirlwind had hit it.

"For millennia," she said, "I have always observed the same thing. I see humans who live amid riches and pleasures and who force their starving slaves to drudge. At first the slaves were driven with great whips which the overseer used to beat them with when they became tired from the heat of the sun. Often these slaves were kept at work with chains on their feet, so that they could not run away. Later the whips disappeared, and the masters boasted of their kindness, saying, 'In these enlightened times, no man is a slave.' But secretly they concealed an invisible whip, hunger, and this drove the people to slavery as surely as the terrible whip the overseers had used previously. I see humans pass here, rich strangers who visit this country out of curiosity, and I see poor Arabs, who work as muleteers, running alongside the mules of the rich, or dragging heavy stones, and barely keeping alive with a few dates and a little corn, just like their ancestors of thousands of years ago."

The Sphinx fell silent and gazed gloomily out into the desert. Finally, she spoke again: "Thousands of years ago, there were gorgeously dressed, bejewelled priests here, who strutted around under the same canopy, next to the rich. They tricked and deceived the people, threatening them with the anger of the gods if they did not suffer their lot patiently. Today, these priests are dressed in black, but they still lie and still stand by the rich, although they worship a god who was a poor carpenter. It has always been the same, for thousands of years." And the Sphinx yawned once more.

"Can you also see into the future, wise Beast?" Sparrow asked shyly.

The Sphinx nodded her enormous head.

"Yes, I can do that too. Listen to my words, little bird. A day will come when all the slaves will rise up in a dreadful struggle against their oppressors. After a long and bloody struggle, they will be victorious, and then a new world will come into being, a world in which everything belongs in common to all, and all humans are free. Even today the earth is trembling in joyful expectation. In the quiet of the night I can feel it quivering. But now you must leave me. For thousands of years I have not spoken to any being. I will speak again only when the day of freedom dawns. Then my voice will join in the jubilation of the liberated peoples."

Sparrow flew out of the desert where he could find nothing to eat, returned to the green stream, and spent many glorious days there.

One day, as he was sitting on a stone by the banks of the stream, he heard familiar voices above him. "Tweet! Tweet!" he heard.

He looked up and saw three swallows who flew slowly down towards him and landed by his side.

“Are you here already?” Sparrow asked in surprise.

“We are, we are indeed,” twittered the swallows. “At home rough winds are already blowing and there is frost in the meadows at night. Winter is coming.”

How frightened Sparrow was when he heard that. Here in this beautiful land, where he had plenty of fat worms and warm sunshine, he had forgotten about his sparrow brothers. And in the meantime, death-bringing winter had come. He must hurry home to teach them how to get to the sunny land. Would he reach them in time? How selfish he had been; if many poor sparrows were freezing and starving at home, it was his fault.

Even as he was thinking these thoughts, he spread his little wings and flew towards the ocean.

In the harbour many silvery-white seagulls were flying about, crying with shrill voices, “A storm is coming! A storm is coming!”

“Which ship is heading north?” Sparrow asked hurriedly.

“None,” one seagull answered. But this was not true. She was a mean bird and wanted to frighten Sparrow.

But he believed her. “Then I must fly over the ocean,” he thought. “I must do it, for whether my brother sparrows live or die depends on me. I cannot leave them in the lurch.”

Sadly, he looked back on the wonderland once more. Then he flew out over the great ocean.

Wild waves dashed up, the storm howled, and a fine rain fell. Within a few hours, Sparrow was so tired that he could no longer fly high. The huge waves wet his feathers, they became heavy with water and dragged him down, deeper and deeper. A monstrous wave reached out for him with its white arms and Sparrow fell into the ocean and was swallowed by the waves.

Because of that, sparrows must still freeze and starve every winter, for there has not been another courageous sparrow to show them the way to the land of the sun.

But did Sparrow endure so much suffering in vain, and die in vain?

No, for the little dark-haired boy on the ship had paid special attention to the story Sparrow had told him and had listened carefully to what Sparrow wanted to do for his sparrow brothers. And this the little boy wanted to do for his fellow-humans. He grew up, and wherever oppressed workers

struggled against their oppressors, he was their leader. But the tale of the dark-haired boy, of his life and his death, is another story and does not belong here.

*Der Spatz. Ein Märchen* (Berlin: Verein Internationaler Verlags-Anstalten, 1922). Illustrations by Karl Holz.

# 11. The Spectacles

Once upon a time there was a big, rich country, where quiet and order always reigned. Although in this country too there were rich and poor and the poor were exploited by the rich, not a word of complaint was ever heard, let alone grumbling or threats. The King sat on his golden throne, fat, well-fed, and satisfied, the well-off citizens lived in their fine houses, fat well-fed, and satisfied, and the poor toiled patiently twelve hours a day in the factories and in the fields. If they did not get paid enough and went hungry, they seemed not to notice it.

Here is how this came about. Many hundreds of years before, a wicked magician, who was a friend of the King's, had lived in this country. This magician had the power to see into the future and he foresaw that the poor would not let themselves be treated like animals for ever, that they would one day demand their rights, and that the grand lifestyle of the kings and the well-off citizens would then become a thing of the past. He wanted to keep this from happening. All his life long, the magician sat in his workshop, cutting glass into little round discs, which he tinted with various colours and made into spectacles. Then he told the king that he and his successors should see to it that each newborn child was immediately fitted with a pair of the spectacles. These were never, on pain of death, to be taken off.

Countless pairs of spectacles, carefully placed on fine pine shavings, were laid out in a vast warehouse. A descendant of the magician was in charge of them. He was immediately informed when a child had come into the world; whereupon he selected the appropriate spectacles for it, and either fitted them himself on the child's tiny nose or had one of his underlings do it.

The spectacles were of very different kinds. The most complicated were those made for the children of the poor. The old magician had worked on them for almost fifty years, until he finally got them the way he wanted. The lenses were ground in such a way that, when they looked through them,

the poor saw their brothers and sisters as very small, helpless, and inferior creatures, but when they looked at the well-off citizens and especially at the King, they saw them through the spectacles as mighty, almost divine beings who were entitled to everything good in the world, whose power no one could resist, and who had the right to make all others into their servants. Finding the right tint for the lenses had also required the old magician to rack his brains for many a day. For the tint had to make the wearer of the spectacles see the wretched hovel he lived in as altogether cozy, comfortable, and agreeable; on the other hand, when he passed by the mansions and gardens of the well-off or the palaces and parks of the King, he was not to see how splendid and grand they were, since he would otherwise ultimately become dissatisfied.

The magician had an easier time producing the spectacles intended for the well-off citizens. Here he had only to mix a little gold or silver with the glass so that, wherever they looked, they would always see only gold and silver, never real living human beings. Moreover, the magician ground the lenses in such a way that the well-off saw the workers as machines made exclusively for their use and benefit.

Making the King's spectacles was the easiest job of all for the magician. They did not even have to be ground. They had only to be dipped once in the blood of the cruelest man who had ever lived and twice in the blood of the dumbest man who had ever lived. When he looked through them the King immediately saw all the things that kings customarily see, in exactly the way that it is suitable for a king to see them.

There were, in addition, a small number of large, rose-coloured spectacles, which were used only very rarely. In the three centuries since the death of the old magician, his descendants had needed to fit them on only three people. These spectacles were intended for a few remarkable individuals who, though fitted with the usual spectacles, still beheld something of how things really are.

For example, there had once been a young poet, a court poet, who lived grandly amid the pleasures of the royal court and enjoyed the admiration and respect of all the better-off citizens. He wrote fine poems in praise of the King and the wisdom of his government and agreeable lyrics for the citizens, extolling their virtues. This young poet could well have been thought to be the happiest man in the world, and in truth he too looked out on it quite cheerfully through his silver-tinted glasses. The citizens were disturbed, it is true, despite their respect for him, by the fact that he did not

wish to become majestically fat like them, but as he was, after all, a poet, they forgave him.

But one day it happened that the poet wandered by accident into the section of town where the poor people lived. It was a beautiful summer's day and the sun's rays were so warm that the silver on one of the lenses of his spectacles melted. And so with one eye the poet saw how things really were, and what he saw so shook and scared him that he could not help crying out. He saw tired, toiling men; haggard, sickly women; starving, emaciated children. Except for him, he thought, no one had seen this, and he had to inform everyone. He ran to the better-off citizens, buried his head in his hands and, in tears, told them of the horrors he had seen. They laughed, figuring that he had gone off his head because of the hot weather. Then he looked up and with his one eye saw the reality. "Thieves! Murderers!" he screamed at the citizens, and ran to the King, hoping to get help from him. But when he found the King and saw him sitting on the throne, he had to shout: "You wicked, cruel fool! What right do you have to sit here on the throne?!"

The poet was put in chains, taken away, and would certainly have been executed, had not the magician, who was in charge of the spectacles, put in a good word for him and explained to the King how the mishap had occurred. And so the ranting, raging poet was dragged before the magician, who placed a pair of rose-coloured spectacles on his nose and said: "Your old spectacles had become faulty, my friend, and that is why you thought you saw such terrible things. Go back on to the street now, look around you, and you will see how mistaken you were."

The poet did as he was asked, and now, seen through the rose-coloured spectacles, everything once again appeared good and beautiful to him. Poverty seemed to him something sublime and holy. "Work dignifies and ennobles," he thought. "How fortunate are those who can be ennobled twelve hours a day." In the well-off citizens, he rediscovered his virtuous friends, and when he came before the King, he was dazzled by his splendor and fell on his knees in veneration.

After this incident the entire country once again enjoyed many, many years of quiet and order.

But when the young poet had become an old poet and lay on his deathbed, he pushed the spectacles away from his dying eyes, and in that split second thought he once again saw what he had seen on that summer's day many years before. By his bedside sat a young girl who had spared no pains to

take good care of him. The poet reached for her hand and stammered: "The spectacles! Take off the spectacles. Look!" Thereupon he died.

The girl went home to her family pensive and confused. She had not properly understood the dying man's words, for the spectacles affected not only vision but the brain. Yet they stuck in her memory and from time to time she wondered what the world might look like if it was looked at without spectacles.

Soon after, she was married to a shoemaker and when their first child, a sturdy boy, entered the world and she saw his large, shining eyes, she remembered the poet's words and, troubled and perplexed, thought it a shame to conceal those beautiful eyes behind an ugly pair of spectacles. Still, things followed their usual course, the magician came, fitted the spectacles on little Fritz's tiny nose, and so everything was in order.

But something strange happened: little Fritz could not abide the spectacles and kept trying to take them off, so that his parents had to be in constant fear that one day he might succeed in doing so, run out on to the street without spectacles, be caught by the forces of order and, in accordance with the law of the land, be put to death. All their pleas and threats were of no avail, however; as soon as Fritz was alone he would tear and pull at the hated spectacles which had been ingeniously tied to the back of his head.

When the boy was almost fully grown, he finally succeeded from time to time in pulling the spectacles off. And then his startled eyes beheld frightful things: misery, deprivation, and impotent helplessness on the one hand; wealth, high living, splendor, and injustice on the other. But he always caught only a glimpse of this, for on each occasion his mother or sister would soon come running after him, scolding and pleading, weeping and threatening, until they got the spectacles put back on him again.

The little he had been able to get a glimpse of was enough, however, to cause great sadness and also arouse great anger in the boy's heart. He constantly tried to figure out how the world might be rid of the injustice he had perceived. Finally he became convinced that the spectacles were chiefly to blame for it all. If his friends and playmates could only look out on the world without spectacles, they too would recognize the injustice that had been done to them and would also see that they were in no way as weak and helpless as the spectacles had deceived them into thinking they were.

So one day, when his father was away in the workshop and his mother

and sister were busy in the kitchen, Fritz tore the spectacles off, stamped on them, and smashed them to smithereens.

He was at first stunned, as if by a blow to the head, by what his seeing eyes now beheld. But then a fire blazed up in his heart that almost consumed him and he swore not to rest or relax until his comrades had also removed their spectacles and recovered their true sight.

But first and foremost it was essential to conceal what he had done from the well-off citizens and the King. Fritz tied a black cloth over his eyes and explained that the light hurt them. The citizens were satisfied with this explanation for they figured that it is even harder to see through a black cloth than through spectacles.

When the darkness of night provided its cover and protection, Fritz slipped out and went to his comrades. He recounted to them all that he had seen, and urged them to throw away their spectacles.

At first they laughed at him, but when he succeeded in talking a number of them into taking off their spectacles for a few short minutes, those who had done so took his side. With time their numbers kept growing, until finally three quarters of the workers had become "anti-spectacles" people.

One day, armed and ready for anything, the "anti-spectacles" people marched out toward the houses of the well-off citizens and the King's palace, pushed their way into the houses, tore the spectacles off the citizens and the King, and demanded their rights. The King was so terrified that he rushed onto the street, began to run, and ran and ran until he came to a country where everyone still wore spectacles and peace and order reigned. At first the well-off citizens prepared to defend themselves, but as they no longer wore spectacles, they could not fail to recognize the might of the "anti-spectacles" people and to acknowledge that they themselves were pathetically dumb scoundrels. Grumbling and with rage in their hearts, they acceded to the demands of the "anti-spectacles" people.

The latter now truly made order in the land: everyone who worked received sufficient pay, anyone who was too lazy to work received nothing. Arrangements were made to take care of the children, the sick, and the elderly, and no one possessed more than he was entitled to.

The country in which the events in this story took place lies in the East, where the sun rises. Perhaps the light is brighter there and so people have learned to see more quickly than in other lands. Yet we all know how fast light travels; it will travel to other lands too and people there will also smash their spectacles. For once they have learned to truly see, they will also

act. In those lands that are still in darkness every individual must help by tearing off his own spectacles, informing his comrades of what he has seen, and recruiting people to the “anti-spectacles” party, until their number is so great that they can become the masters of a happy and free world.

“Die Brillen” in *Es war einmal... und es wird sein. Märchen*. Umschlag, Initialen und Bilder zeichnete Heinrich Vogeler (Berlin:Verlag der Jugendinternationale, 1930), pp. 27-31. [First published in *Ali der Teppichweber*. Mit Zeichnungen von John Heartfield (Berlin: Malik-Verlag, 1923), pp. 34-38]