

THOMAS MANN

Death in Venice

AND OTHER TALES

*Translated by*  
JOACHIM NEUGROSCHER

PENGUIN BOOKS



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## DEATH IN VENICE

THOMAS MANN was born in 1875, in the North German town of Lübeck. His father was a member of the local Hanseatic bourgeoisie, a merchant by profession and a senator on the city council, and his mother was of South American descent, part Portuguese and part Creole. His elder brother was the novelist Heinrich Mann. His early childhood and school years were spent in Lübeck, and at the age of nineteen he went to Munich, where he joined an insurance company. In his free time he studied literature and eventually attended the University of Munich. After a year in Rome he returned to Germany. He married Katja Pringsheim in 1905 and they had six children. His earlier major works include *Buddeubrooks* (1901), *Death in Venice* (1911), *Royal Highness* (1916), and *The Magic Mountain* (1924). During the 1920s Mann supported the Weimar Republic on his many lecture tours in Germany and abroad, and in 1929 was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. With Hitler's rise to power, Mann decided to live in Switzerland and publicly dissociated himself from the National Socialist regime. He was deprived of his German citizenship in 1936. During this period he wrote the biblical tetralogy *Joseph and His Brothers*. He was visiting professor to Princeton in 1938 and wrote *Lotte in Weimar* before settling in California, where he was in close touch with other distinguished German emigrant writers and artists. He wrote *Doctor Faustus* and *The Holy Sinner*. In 1944 he became a citizen of the United States. He revisited Germany in 1949 and in 1952 returned to Switzerland, where *The Blue Swan* (1954) and *Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man* (1955) were written. He died in 1955.

JOACHIM NEUGROSCHER has translated numerous books from French, German, Italian, Russian, and Yiddish. He has won three PEN translation awards and the French-American translation prize. His most recent translations include Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, and Alexandre Dumas's *The Man in the Iron Mask*, all for Penguin Classics.

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

A whole century has worn by since Thomas Mann began publishing, and both German and English have gone through tremendous changes—but obviously under very diverse circumstances and in very different directions. There is no neat parallel between these two—or, presumably, any two—languages, since the respective cultures they express and reflect are not evenly parallel. So a “retro” translation, in a “period” English that was contemporaneous with the German of a given text, may actually be a distortion.

The year 1900 or 1920 in German-speaking countries was not the same as 1900 or 1920 in England or North America. In fact, in literature, such dates are fiction. Despite the narrative past tense, which, as a metaphor, asks us to suspend our disbelief, those dates never “existed” in literature: they exist only in the present—during the action of reading. If we talk about history, we can say that the American Civil War *began* (past tense) in 1861; if we talk about fiction, we have to say that in *Gone with the Wind* the Civil War *begins* (present tense) in 1861. And if authors wish, they can juggle time and historical events; they can do what Friedrich Schiller does (did?) in his play *The Maid of Orleans* (in which Joan of Arc dies in battle), or what Jean Anouilh did (does?) in *The Lark* (flash back having Joan present at the coronation of the Dauphin *after* she’s burned at the stake).

Now suppose we want to evoke an earlier German era by relying on some form of English that was current in, say, 1900 or 1920. In order to draw that pseudoparallel to the German of those times, whose English should we tap? Jack London’s, William Dean Howells’s, Henry James’s? And suppose we opt for Henry James, because he bears a seeming resemblance to Thomas Mann by way of rich vocabulary, complex hypotaxis, and intricate prose rhythms? Well, but a Johnsonian sentence in Henry James is neither historically nor stylistically equivalent to a Kantian sentence in Thomas Mann.

One reason for this lack of cross-linguistic identity is that English and German use subordinate clauses for different purposes. Modern English limits perfect tenses to the bare-bones plot and imperfect tenses to the background. German, having far fewer tenses than English and no verbal aspects, makes a *syntactical* distinction between narrative foreground and background: the plot is generally carried along by the main clauses, the background is painted in by the subordinate clauses. And since the German verb is always postponed until the end of a subordinate clause, the contrast between main clause and subordinate clause—i.e., between plot and background—is as striking as the English contrast between perfective and imperfective verbs. As a result, German narrative always has to be hypotactical, while English can easily be more paratactical. The opening verse in Amy Lowell’s “Patterns” goes: “I walk down the garden path, and all the daffodils are blowing....” In English, the contrast between foreground (perfective “walk”) and background (imperfective “are blowing”) is brought out by the verbal aspects in the two main clauses. But in German, which doesn’t have verbal aspects, the second main clause would have to be turned into a relative clause—with the verb swinging in at the end.

Even within a clause, there are countless syntactical differences between English and German usage, making for very different rhythms. Take the order of adverbs. In English, place comes before time; in German, time comes before place: “I’m going to school tomorrow” versus “*Ich gehe morgen in die Schule*” (literally, “I’m going tomorrow to school”).

Or take a series of parallel parts of speech—for instance, a row of adjectives. In English, you can

say “a big, crooked stick” but not “a crooked big stick.” Why and why not? There are two reasons. First, one thing, in a chain of parallel parts of speech, the words normally fall into size place, moving from the shortest to the longest: “tall, dark, and handsome,” “Tom, Dick, and Harry,” “The Good, the Beautiful, and the Ugly,” “the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa María*.” Since German rhetoric doesn’t have the gradation rule, the word order in the English translation has to be readjusted to conform to our rules of rhythm.

The “big, crooked stick” is also obedient to a second tendency in English adjectives: the more intrinsic the adjective, the closer it stands to the noun. We can apply Aristotelian categories here: “essence” overrides “accident,” so that an “essential” feature is closer to the noun than an “accidental” one. “Crooked” is more intrinsic to the stick than “big” and therefore spatially closer to “stick.” Indeed, this demand is so powerful that it takes precedence over the law of size place. At times Mann’s original German can easily be rendered into English: “*am Strande, in der Hotelhalle und auf der Piazza San Marco*” becomes “on the beach, in the hotel lobby, and on Piazza di San Marco.” No rearranging is necessary: the rhythm ascends in both German and English. But at other times, the German words have to be switched around to conform to English rhythm.

Another source of maddening dilemmas are the phonetics, the tapestries of modulated sounds: each language has its own. The vocal harmonies and disharmonies are found in even the simplest utterances: “Fee, fie, fo, fum,” grunts the giant in “Jack and the Beanstalk,” following a pattern of vowels that move methodically through the shaping of the lips and the positioning of the vowels in the mouth. These patterns determine all sorts of phonetic structures, including the most obvious, such as rhyme, assonance, alliteration—which are used in ordinary speech in both German and English. Thomas Mann not only draws on them as musical devices; he luxuriates in them, say, for the Wagnerian carnality in “The Blood of the Walsungs.” Where possible, we can mirror them, relying perhaps on the Germanic (i.e., Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian) portions of English vocabulary. By the same token, the meshworks of English sounds, whether harmonious or deliberately discordant, play a decisive role in the choice of words and syntax—if the translation is to exist in its own right.

The translator also has to watch out for other pitfalls. We must, for example, avoid any lineup of too many unstressed syllables, which weaken the impact of a sentence. And be careful of polysyllabic rhymes: they are an essential part of the music in German (and certainly in, say, French and Italian). Normally, however, they are used only for comic effects in English, which overwhelmingly prefers monosyllabic rhymes for serious poetry (Swinburne was a very sensual exception, a genius at drawing the most fervent effects from polysyllabic rhymes).

Thomas Mann’s style evolved considerably from his early stories to his later ones, broadening in its vocabulary, more complex in its syntax, more varied in its rhythms, and more aloof—at times disdainfully so—in its overall habitus. One of the main functions of this development was to cope with stronger and deeper emotions, especially within an erotic context, by creating an alienation effect that often draws on irony. In his depictions, Mann focused on powerful impulses, especially the outgushing of repressed feelings, the flouting of sexual taboos such as incest, homosexuality, even mixed marriage. And to face such challenges, he developed an analytical method of objectifying these factors, treating them with detachment by filtering them through his special language.

Art operates as two components of Mann’s alienation approach. On the one hand, his characters sustain art as a primary reality rather than a surrogate reflection. The protagonist of “Gladius Dei” is horrified by paintings that he considers blasphemous because of their fleshly enticements; the siblings in “The Blood of the Walsungs” have sex under the impact of Wagnerian opera and its highly peculiar diction; and Gustav von Aschenbach, in *Death in Venice*, constantly sees Tadzio in terms of aesthetic

allusions and references, philosophical theories and literary recollection. Mann's leading characters are often professional or would-be artists trying to grasp their existence and situation as creative people. In his fiction, experience, whether mental or physical, is sifted through art.

The second job of art in Thomas Mann is the use of language as a fairly self-contained aesthetic medium to both evoke and distance: no matter what the words may conjure up emotionally, the author's irony keeps the feelings in check, whereby his increasingly complicated syntax establishes a network of bars—but who is in the cage and who outside? Tadzio? Aschenbach? Or the reader? Or could Mann's sentences work like the beaded lead in a stained-glass window, keeping the colors apart yet holding the overall image together both physically and visually?

Intricate syntax has been a hallmark of German thinking at least since Kant, whose periods, highly elaborate, are lucid since he was a master of German style. Later epigoni cultivated hopelessly tangled sentences because they were demanded of a serious thinker, while simple speech was dismissed as simplistic—though in many cases ensnarled sentences (need it be said yet again?) disguised rather than shallow and muddled thinking. Thomas Mann, however, with his very sensitive ear, obviously knew how to manipulate his syntactical entwinements, creating a personal rhythm, in which any camouflage is aimed at concealing yet revealing emotions, impulses, vagaries.

To keep his diction fresh and vibrant, Mann generally avoids clichés, even idioms, in which the dormant image is so worn out that its presence would be stylistically harmful. Here, unbeknownst to Mann, a translator is confronted with a major distinction between British and American writing. Americans tend to regard set phrases (like “hand in hand”) as clichés, while the British treat them as idioms—solid, traditional, and conventional in a positive sense of the term. For Americans they're too conventional—and Mann's German, in an interesting linguistic parallel, likewise avoids them most of the time.

To make up for the nearly total exclusion of idioms, Mann invents his own “clichés,” Wagnerian leitmotifs that are attached to the characters and reiterated frequently, identifying a person by reducing him or her to a fragment—or a butterfly struggling on a pin. But unlike their operatic uses, these leitmotifs never play off of one another or weave together, they are never modulated or riffed. Quite the opposite: they isolate Mann's characters or situations, disrupting the originality of his language with their recurring rigidity. These fracturing leitmotifs are part of the overall irony, caricature as characterization.

Similarly, the linking of illness, death, and sex may be derived from Wagner's *Liebtestod*; but in Mann this interlacing goes through various metamorphoses in both approach and language. In “The Will for Happiness,” sickness and eroticism are kept apart but then finally merge—until one partner dies. In “Little Herr Friedemann,” the verbal expression (and frustration) of repressed sexual longing leads to suicide, in an anti-Narcissus drowning: Narcissus never realized he was in love with his own reflection, whereas Friedemann knowingly hates his own looks, his own life. He enters the “mirror” and drowns in the water.

Taking the notion of narcissism (in its modern sense) and anti-narcissism a step further, we note that both features mark some of Mann's characters, including the twins, especially the boy, in “The Blood of the Walsungs” and, in *Death in Venice*, the old reveler on the boat, Tadzio, and ultimately von Aschenbach, each of whom eroticizes his own image either through an actual mirror or through the looking glass of other people's reactions. This eroticism is expressed partly in a language that includes the realism of cosmetic details and, in some cases, the lyricism of a more sublime diction—such as an alliterative imitation of Wagnerian sex in “The Blood of the Walsungs.”

This latter story involves a number of interesting language problems, including deliberate omissions

and revision. In describing a wealthy, assimilated Jewish family in turn-of-the-century Berlin, Mann cunningly avoids any mention of the words “Jew” or “Jewish” (just as Kafka avoided these words altogether throughout his fiction). In the manuscript, the final disdainful sentence (according to Klaus Harpprecht, in *Thomas Mann*, Rowohlt, 1995) was ultimately rewritten. The original line went: “*Beganeft haben wir ihn,—den Goy!*” “We’ve robbed him—the Goy!” Both *beganeft* (cheated/robbed) and *Goy* (Gentile—often pejorative) are Yiddishisms. Throughout modern German history and literature, Yiddish and unassimilated Jews were so thoroughly denigrated that German writers portrayed nice Jews as speaking perfect German and nasty Jews as yiddling. Check out Bernhard Eisler, the utterly Germanized, utterly refined, utterly cultured, and therefore anything but Jewish Jew in Gustav Freytag’s novel *Credit and Debit* and that sneaky, yiddling traitor Moses Freudenstein in Wilhelm Raabe’s *The Hunger Pastor*. A Yiddish accent in German is still so heavily charged with negative connotations that when Max Frisch wrote *They’re Singing Again* in post-World War II Switzerland, he had the Jewish survivor in this play speak straight Yiddish rather than German with a Yiddish accent. Mann patronizes his Jewish characters by letting them speak flawless German, though he hints that the twins’ parents may have a Yiddish accent: “Frau Aarenhold’s ... speech was laden with bizarre and richly guttural words—expressions from her childhood dialect.” Recording a Yiddish accent would have made their portraits even more degrading in German eyes—though Mann, whose wife was Jewish, whose publisher (Samuel Fischer) was Jewish, usually had few pleasant things to say about Jews (in his fiction or his correspondence). While he gently chides the Buddenbrook family and its social circle for their snobbery toward a half-Jewish family, it was not until the Fascist and Nazi era that he showed any sympathy with the Jewish plight. By then, he even recalled a historic massacre of Jews in his novel *The Beloved Returns (Lotte in Weimar)*; and he also resurrected biblical and Talmudic narratives in his Joseph tetralogy—in which, I am happy to report, the Jews, from Abraham to Joseph, all speak exquisite German.

However, Mann’s portraits of the Aarenhold twins had ramifications that he himself was unaware of. Some historians claim that even assimilated Jews were distinguished in a crucial way from non-Jews in Germany and especially Catholic Austria: Jews saw aesthetics as an ethical issue, while non-Jews (especially the aristocracy and its emulator, the bourgeoisie) enjoyed art as hedonism (see Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews*, Cambridge, 1989). Whether or not this generalization is valid, the “Wal sung” twins revel in art as the ultimate amoral pleasure, and their sexuality takes assimilation to a new and unheard-of level. Yet ironically, through this very incest, they renew their status as outsiders in the vacuum of assimilationists, who abandoned their heritage but were never accepted by the German society they so deeply yearned to join. So they turned inward. (Had this story been penned by a rabbi, it might have been subtitled “The Perils of Assimilation.”)

In *Death in Venice*, the artist as outsider is one theme. On its simplest level, the story is Balzacian—and Freudian: a man who has always repressed his sexuality and sublimated it entirely into his creative duties is suddenly overwhelmed by a love that is both platonic and plutonic. His Protestant ethic and discipline both drown in his physical and spiritual hormones. He submits to a southern hedonism that proves lethal, because the author, true to his bourgeois morals, links art (even bourgeois art) and pleasure (especially erotic pleasure) to disease and death. To fight against the loss of self-control, against the overpowering libido, Mann’s syntax clamps down on the sun-drenched, salt-sprayed voluptuousness that Aschenbach escapes only by dying.

The overall difficulties facing the translator of these texts, with their varying dictions, occur in just about every single word—and in between the words. Problems of rhythm and rhetoric are particularly challenging.

In rendering Thomas Mann's style, I especially had to observe its profound evolution from one story to the next: the growing richness of its lexicon, the greater intricacy of its periods, the exploration of more and more subtle rhythms. The best way, I feel, to bridge the gap between Mann's German and current American readers is to forge a special brand of English, particularly for the most complicated texts, stretching limits in order to convey the music and meaning of the original style. The gap, which is as old as these two societies, runs much wider and deeper: socially, politically, aesthetically, down to the very subject matter and its treatment, whereby each author has his melodies, each style, each language its own music—as does each translation.

*New York, October 1997*

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# THE WILL FOR HAPPINESS

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OLD HOFMANN HAD EARNED his money as a plantation owner in South America. After marrying a local girl from a good family there, he had soon taken her back to northern Germany, the place of his birth. They lived in my hometown, where the rest of his family likewise resided. Paolo was born here.

Incidentally, I never got to know his parents very intimately. However, Paolo was the very image of his mother. The first time I saw him—that is, the first time our fathers brought us to school—he was a skinny little boy with sallow coloring. I can still see him. He wore his black hair in long curls that fell tangled, on the collar of his sailor suit, framing his narrow little face.

Since we had both been very well off at home, we were anything but satisfied with our new surroundings: the bare school-room, and especially the shabby, red-bearded person who was intent on teaching us our ABCs. When my father tried to leave, I held on to his coat and cried, while Paolo remained utterly passive. He leaned against the wall, motionless, his lips pressed together and his big, tear-filled eyes gazing at the rest of the youngsters, hopeful creatures who kept poking one another in the ribs and grinning callously.

Surrounded in this way by larva-like faces, we felt drawn to each other from the very start, and we were glad that the red-bearded pedagogue let us sit next to one another. From then on we studied together, jointly laying the basis for our education and swapping our sandwiches daily.

By the way, he was already sickly back then, as I recall. Now and again he would have to skip school for longish periods, and when he returned, his cheeks and temples showed, more clearly than usual, the pale-blue veins that can be frequently noticed in delicate brunets. He always had those veins. That was the first thing I noticed when we met again here in Munich and also afterward in Rome.

Our friendship lasted throughout our school years, roughly for the same reason that had prompted it in the first place. It was the “Solemnity of Distance” toward most of our fellow students, an attitude familiar to everyone who has secretly read Heine at fifteen and, while still in high school, resolutely pronounces judgment on the world and mankind.

We also—I believe we were sixteen—took dancing lessons together and, as a result, jointly experienced our first love.

The little girl he was infatuated with was a cheerful, blond creature, and he worshiped her with a melancholy ardor that was remarkable for someone his age and at times struck me as downright lurid.

I remember one dance in particular. The little girl brought two cotillion badges, in quick succession to another boy and none to Paolo. I watched him anxiously. He stood next to me, leaning against the wall, staring motionless at his patent-leather shoes, and suddenly he fainted. He was taken home and lay sick for a week. It turned out—on this occasion, I think—that his heart was not all that sound.

He had already begun to draw, even before this time, developing a sturdy talent. I still have a quite faithful charcoal sketch he dashed off of that girl’s face, along with the caption, a quotation from Heine: “You are just like a flower!—Paolo Hofmann fecit.”

I don’t know exactly when it was, but we were upperclassmen when his parents left town, settling

Karlsruhe, where old Hofmann had connections. Paolo was not to change schools; instead he was sent to live with an old professor.

However, this situation was short-lived. The following incident may not have been the reason why Paolo eventually followed his parents to Karlsruhe, but it certainly contributed.

What happened was that during a religion class, the senior teacher suddenly strode over to him with a paralyzing glare, and from under the Old Testament that lay in front of Paolo, he yanked forth a drawing of a very female shape that, complete except for the left foot, presented itself unabashedly to the eyes.

So Paolo moved to Karlsruhe, and now and then we exchanged postcards, a correspondence that gradually tapered off and ended.

After our separation, some five years had passed before I ran into him again, in Munich. One lovely spring morning, while strolling down Amalia Street, I spotted someone coming down the steps of the Academy, a man who, from a distance, seemed almost to be an Italian model. When I drew closer, I saw it was he.

Of medium height, slender, his hat pushed back on his thick black hair, his sallow skin crisscrossed with tiny blue veins, his clothes elegant but casual—for instance, a few buttons were undone on the vest—his short mustache slightly twirled up, he came toward me with a swaying, indolent gait.

We recognized each other almost simultaneously, and our greetings were very hearty. As we sat on the terrace of the Café Minerva, catching up on the last few years, he seemed to be in high spirits, almost overexcited. His eyes shone, and his gestures were large and broad. Yet he looked bad, truly ill. It's easy for me to say so now; but I actually did notice it back then, and I even told him so flat out.

“Really? Still?” he asked. “Yes, I do believe you. I've been ill a lot. Last year I was even seriously ill. It's located here.”

He pointed to his chest with his left hand.

“My heart. It's always been the same. But lately I've been feeling very fine, quite excellent. I can say that I'm completely healthy. Besides, at twenty-three-why, it would be sad....”

His mood was really good. He spoke cheerfully and vividly about his life since our separation. He had soon talked his parents into letting him become a painter, had graduated from the Academy some nine months ago (he had dropped in today by pure chance), had lived abroad a good deal, especially in Paris, and had settled here in Munich about five months earlier.... “Probably for a long time—whether you know? Perhaps forever ...”

“Really?” I asked.

“Oh, well? I mean, why not? I like the city, I like it a whole lot! The entire ambience—you know! The people! Why—and this is not unimportant—my social status as a painter, even a totally unknown one, is exquisite; it couldn't be better anywhere else....”

“Have you met pleasant people?”

“Yes—few but very good ones. For instance, I have to recommend one family—I met them during Mardi Gras.... The carnival is charming here! Their name is Stein. In fact, Baron Stein.”

“What kind of aristocracy is that?”

“What's called a 'money aristocracy.' The baron was a stock marketeer, he used to play a colossal role in Vienna, associated with all the highnesses, and so forth.... Then he suddenly got into a jam and managed to extricate himself with a cool million, they say, and now he's living here, without pomp but pleasantly.”

“Is he Jewish?”

“I don't think he is. But his wife is, presumably. All I can say, though, is that they're extremely

pleasant and fine people.”

“Are there children?”

“No—that is, a nineteen-year-old daughter. The parents are very charming....”

He seemed embarrassed for a moment, then added:

“I’m seriously offering to introduce you to them. I’d be delighted. Are you interested?”

“Very much so. I’ll be grateful to you. If only to meet that nineteen-year-old daughter ...”

He peered at me askance and then said:

“Fine, then. Let’s not put it off for too long. If it’s convenient for you, I’ll pick you up tomorrow afternoon around one or one-thirty. They live at 25 Theresa Street, one flight up. I’m looking forward to presenting an old schoolmate. The matter is settled.”

And indeed, early the next afternoon we were ringing the doorbell on the second floor of an elegant mansion on Theresa Street. Next to the bell, the name “Baron von Stein” could be read in broad black letters.

All the way there, Paolo had been exhilarated and almost rip roaringly merry; but now, as we waited for the door to open, I noticed an odd change coming over him. Standing next to me, he was utterly calm except for a nervous twitching of his eyelids—a tense and tremendous calm. His head stuck forward slightly. The skin on his brow was tight. He almost resembled an animal desperately pricking up its ears and listening with all its muscles tensed.

The butler, who carried away our cards, returned and asked us to be seated, the baroness would appear momentarily, and he opened the door to a medium-sized room with dark furniture.

As we entered, a young woman in light-colored spring attire got up in the alcove facing the street and for an instant she remained standing and eyed us quizzically. The nineteen-year-old daughter, I thought, involuntarily glancing sideways at my companion. “Baroness Ada!” he whispered to me.

She had an elegant figure, but her form was mature for her age, and with her very soft and almost languid gestures, she scarcely appeared to be that young a girl. Her hair, combed over her temples with two curls dangling above her forehead, was a shiny black, contrasting forcefully with the mat white of her complexion. With its full, moist lips, its fleshy nose, and its black almond eyes and dark arching brows, her face left no doubt whatsoever as to her at least partly Semitic extraction, yet it was a face of a quite uncommon beauty.

“Ah—company?” she asked, taking several steps toward us. Her voice was a bit husky. She cupped her eyes with one hand as if to see better, while she propped her other hand on the grand piano that stood against the wall.

“And very welcome company at that,” she added with the same emphasis, as if recognizing me as a friend only now; then she cast an inquiring look at me.

Paolo walked toward her and, with the almost drowsy slowness of someone indulging in an exquisite pleasure, he bowed wordlessly over the hand that she held out to him.

“Baroness,” he then said, “may I take the liberty of presenting a friend of mine, a schoolmate with whom I learned my ABCs....”

She likewise held out her hand toward me—a soft, seemingly boneless hand without jewelry.

“I am delighted,” she said, her dark eyes resting on me with a slight intrinsic quiver. “And my parents will be equally delighted.... I hope they have been notified.”

She settled on the sofa, while we sat in chairs across from her. During our chat, her limp white hands rested on her lap. Puffy sleeves reached only slightly below her elbows. I noticed the soft shape of her wrist.

Several minutes later, the door to the adjacent room opened, and the parents walked in. The baroness



was an elegant, thickset gentleman with a bald head and a gray goatee; he had an inimitable way of throwing his thick gold watchband into his cuff. There was no way of determining with any certainty whether a few syllables of his name had once been sacrificed to his elevation to the baronage; his wife, on the other hand, was a homely little Jewish woman in a tasteless gray dress. Large diamonds sparkled on her ears.

I was introduced and welcomed in a thoroughly charming way, while they shook my companion's hand as if he were a good friend of the family.

After some questions and answers about my whys and where-fors, they began to talk about an exhibition in which Paolo had a painting, a female nude.

"A truly fine work!" said the baron. "I recently stood in front of it for half an hour. The flesh torn against the red carpet is eminently powerful. Oh, yes, that Herr Hofmann!" And he patronizingly tapped Paolo on the back. "But do not overwork yourself, my young friend! For goodness' sake! You absolutely have to take care of yourself. How is your health?"

While I had given the host and hostess the necessary information about myself, Paolo had exchanged a few quiet words with the baroness, whom he closely faced. The strange, tense calm that I had previously noticed in him had not vanished by any means. Without my being able to quite pinpoint the reason, he seemed like a panther ready to pounce. The dark eyes in the narrow, salloped face had such a sickly glow that I found it almost eerie when he replied to the baron's question in a confident tone:

"Oh, excellent! Thank you so much for asking! I'm in very good health!"

When we rose after something like a quarter of an hour, the baroness reminded my friend that it would be Thursday again in two days and that he must not forget her five o'clock tea. At this point she also asked me to be so kind as to bear that day in mind...

Out in the street, Paolo lit a cigarette.

"Well?" he asked. "What do you think?"

"Oh, they're very pleasant people!" I hurried to answer. "I was quite impressed with the nineteen-year-old daughter!"

"Impressed?" He laughed briefly and turned his head to the other side.

"Yes. You're laughing!" I said. "And up there it sometimes seemed as if your eyes were dimmed by ... some secret longing. But I'm mistaken?"

He was silent for a moment. Then he slowly shook his head. "If only I knew where you—"

"Oh, please! The question for me is whether Baroness Ada also ..."

He mutely looked down for another moment. Then he murmured with confidence:

"I believe I will be happy."

I said goodbye, heartily shaking his hand even though I could not mentally suppress a qualm.

Several weeks passed, during which I periodically joined Paolo for afternoon tea in the baron's salon. A small but very pleasant group would gather there: a young actress of the Royal Theater, a physician, an officer ... I do not remember each and every one.

As for Paolo's behavior, I detected nothing new. Usually, despite his alarming appearance, he was in an exalted, joyful mood, and in the young baroness's proximity he always showed the same eerie calm that I had perceived in him the very first time.

Now, one day—and I happened not to have seen Paolo in two days—I ran into Baron von Stein on Ludwig Street. He was on horseback. Reining in, he held out his hand to me from the saddle.

"Delighted to see you! I hope you can drop by tomorrow afternoon?"

"If it is all right with you, then beyond any doubt, Herr Baron. Even if there were any doubt that m

friend Hofmann would pick me up, as he does every Thursday....”

“Hofmann? Why, didn’t you know? He’s left town! I would have thought that he would inform you of all people.”

“He didn’t say a word!”

“And so utterly a *bâtons rompus* ... That’s what’s known as an artist’s whims.... Well, till tomorrow afternoon!”

He spurred his horse and left me behind, completely baffled.

I hurried over to Paolo’s apartment. Yes, alas: I was told that Herr Hofmann was traveling. He had left no forwarding address.

It was clear that the baron knew of something more than an “artist’s whims.” His daughter herself confirmed what I already assumed.

She did so on a stroll to the valley of the Isar River; they had arranged it, and I was invited too. We did not leave until afternoon, and on the way home, late that evening, the baron’s daughter and I were the last pair following the party.

I had perceived no change in her since Paolo’s disappearance. She had fully maintained her composure, never uttering so much as a word about my friend, while her parents profusely expressed their regret about his sudden departure.

By now I was walking with the baroness through this most graceful area in the surroundings of Munich; the moonlight flickered through the foliage, and for a while we listened silently to the chitchat indulged in by the rest of the company—it was every bit as monotonous as the gush of the water foaming along beside us.

All at once, she began talking about Paolo; her tone was very calm and very sure.

“You’ve been his friend since boyhood?” she asked me.

“Yes, Baroness.”

“You share his secrets?”

“I believe I am familiar with his greatest secret, even though he hasn’t confided in me.”

“And I may trust you?”

“I hope you do not doubt it, dear Fräulein.”

“Fine,” she said, raising her head in a resolute movement. “He asked for my hand, and my parents turned him down. He’s ill, they told me, very ill—but it doesn’t matter: I *love* him. I can speak to you like this, can’t I? I ...”

She was confused for a moment and then went on with the same resoluteness:

“I don’t know where he is; but I give you permission, the instant you see him, to repeat my words which he has already heard from my lips, and to write them to him the instant you track down his address: I will never give my hand to any man but him. Ah—we shall see!”

That last outcry contained, along with defiance and resolution, such a hopeless pain that I could do nothing but help but take hold of her hand and silently squeeze it.

I had already written a letter to Hofmann’s parents, inquiring about their son’s whereabouts. They had received an address in South Tyrol, but the letter I sent there was returned with the notice that the addressee had left without indicating his destination.

He refused to be pestered by anyone; he had fled everything in order to die somewhere in total solitude. For after all this, I felt a sad likelihood that I would never see him again.

Was it not obvious that this hopelessly sick man loved that young girl with the silent, volcanic and ardently sensual passion consistent with the identical first stirrings of his early adolescence? The sick man’s egoistic instinct had kindled the desire for a union with radiant health; since this ardor

remained unsated, was it not bound to swiftly devour his last ounce of vitality?

~~And five years passed without my receiving any sign of life from him—but also without any news of his death.~~

Now, during the previous year, I had been in Italy, in Rome and its surroundings. I had spent the best months in the mountains, returning to town at the end of September. One warm evening I was sitting over a cup of tea at the Café Arancio. Leafing through my newspaper, I glanced absently at the lively bustle dominating the vast, light-filled space. The patrons were coming and going, the waiters dashing to and fro, and now and then the drawn-out yells of newsboys resounded through the wide-open door into the café.

And suddenly I saw a man around my age threading his way slowly through the tables and toward the exit. That gait ...? And now he turned his head toward me, raised his eyebrows, and came toward me with a joyfully astonished “Ah?”

“You here?” We shouted it in unison, and he added:

“So then we’re both still alive!”

His eyes darted slightly away as he said that. He had barely changed in those five years; except that his face may have grown even narrower, with his eyes lying deeper in their sockets. Now and again he took a deep breath.

“Have you been in Rome a long time?” he asked.

“Not so long in the city; I spent a few months in the country-side. And you?”

“I was at the seashore until a week ago. You know I’ve always preferred it to the mountains.... Yes, since we last met I’ve seen a good bit of the world.”

And while spooning up a glass of *sorbetto* next to me, he began telling me how he had spent those years traveling, always traveling. He had rambled through the Tyrolean mountains, had slowly crisscrossed all of Italy, had sailed from Sicily to Africa, and he spoke about Algiers, Tunis, Egypt.

“Finally I spent a little time in Germany,” he said, “in Karlsruhe. My parents urgently wished to see me and were very reluctant to let me take off again. Now I’ve been in Italy for three months. I feel home in the south, you know. I just love Rome!”

I had not spoken even one word to ask him about his health. Now I said:

“May I infer from all this that your health has significantly improved?”

He eyed me quizzically for a moment; then he replied:

“You mean because I wander about so cheerfully. Ah, let me tell you: This is a very natural need. What do you expect? I’m not allowed to drink, smoke, or love—I need some sort of narcotic, do you understand?”

Since I held my tongue, he added:

“For five years now, I’ve needed it *very much*.”

We had reached the topic that we had been avoiding, and the ensuing pause betrayed our mutual helplessness. He sat leaning against the velvet cushion, gazing up at the chandelier. Then he suddenly said:

“Above all—you do forgive me, don’t you, for not getting in touch with you for such a long time? You do understand?”

“Certainly!”

“You’re informed about my experiences in Munich?” he went on, in an almost harsh tone.

“As thoroughly as possible. And do you realize that I’ve been waiting all this time to deliver a message to you? A task assigned by a lady?”

His weary eyes flared up briefly. Then he said in the same dry, sharp tone as before:

“Let me hear whether it’s something new.”

“Hardly new; just a confirmation of what you heard from her yourself....”

And I repeated for him, in the midst of the chattering and gesticulating throng, the words spoken to me that evening by the baroness.

He listened while slowly rubbing his forehead; then he said, with no sign of emotion:

“Thank you.”

His tone of voice was starting to confuse me.

“But years have passed over those words,” I said, “five long years that she and you, both of you, have lived through.... A thousand new impressions, feelings, thoughts, wishes—”

I broke off, for he straightened up and said in a voice quivering again with the passion that, for a moment, I had thought was snuffed:

“I *keep* these words!”

And at that instant I recognized, in his features and in his entire bearing, the expression I had observed on his face when I had first met the baroness: that drastic, convulsively tense calm shown by the predator before it pounces.

I changed the subject, and we again spoke about his travels, about his studies abroad. They did not seem to have amounted to much; he talked about them rather indifferently.

Shortly after midnight he stood up.

“I’d like to go to bed or at least be alone.... You’ll find me tomorrow morning at the Galleria Doria. I’m copying Saraceni; I’ve fallen in love with the musical angel. Do come over, please. I’m very glad you’re here. Good night.”

And he went off—slow, calm, with slack, indolent movements.

I spent the whole next month roaming the city with him: Rome, that effusively rich museum of all the arts, that modern metropolis in the south, that city, which is full of loud, quick, hot, ingenious life and yet to which the warm wind carries the sultry languor of the Orient.

Paolo’s behavior remained the same. He was usually earnest and silent and could at times lapse into a sluggish fatigue, and then, with flashing eyes, he would suddenly pull himself together and eagerly resume a suspended conversation.

I must mention a day when he dropped a few words that have attained their true meaning for me only now.

It was a Sunday. We had taken advantage of the wonderful late-summer morning to go strolling out on the Via Appia. After walking way out on the ancient thoroughfare, we had climbed a small rise that was encircled by cypresses, offers a delightful view of the sunny *campagna* with the huge aqueduct and the Alban Hills, all shrouded in a soft mist. And now we were resting.

Paolo, half reclining, his chin propped on his hand, rested next to me on the warm turf, his weary eyes gazing vacantly into the distance. Then yet again he abruptly pulled himself out of total apathy and turned to me.

“This atmosphere! Atmosphere is everything!”

I said something in agreement, and we were silent once more. And then suddenly, with no transition, he said, his face veering toward me with a certain urgency:

“Listen, weren’t you actually surprised that I’m still alive?”

Taken aback, I held my tongue, and he again peered into the distance with a wistful expression.

“It does surprise *me*,” he slowly went on. “Basically it amazes me every day. Do you really know what my condition is? The French doctor in Algiers said to me, ‘The devil only knows how you can still keep traveling! I advise you to go home and get to bed!’ He was always so straightforward.”

because we played dominoes together every evening.

~~“I’m still alive. I’m at the end almost daily. In the evening, I lie in the dark—on my right side—on my right side—on my right side—mind you! My heart beats almost into my throat, I’m so dizzy that I break out in a cold sweat, and then I suddenly feel as if death were touching me. For an instant it’s as if everything were standing still inside me: my heart pauses, I stop breathing. I jump up, switch on the light, take a deep breath, look around, devour the objects with my eyes. Then I have a sip of water and lie down again always on my right side! I gradually fall asleep.~~

~~“I sleep very deep and very long, for actually I am always dead tired. Would you believe that if I wanted to, I could simply lie down here and die?~~

~~“I believe that during these past few years I have already seen death face-to-face a thousand times and I have not died.... Something is holding me.... I jump up, I think of something, I cling to a sentence which I repeat to myself twenty times while my eyes greedily suck in all the light and life around me.... Do you understand that?”~~

~~He lay motionless and barely seemed to expect any answer. I don’t recall my response; but I will never forget the impact his words made on me.~~

~~And now for that day—oh, I feel as if it had been only yesterday!~~

~~It was one of the first days of autumn, those gray, incredibly warm days when the damp, oppressive wind from Africa blows through the streets and sheet lightning flashes endlessly across the entire evening sky.~~

~~In the morning, I dropped in on Paolo to pick him up for a stroll. His big trunk stood in the middle of the room, the closet and the dresser drawers were wide open; his watercolor sketches from the Orient and the plaster cast of the Vatican head of Juno were still in their places.~~

~~He himself stood, tall and erect, at the window and kept his gaze riveted to the outside when I halted with an astonished cry. Then he briefly turned, handed me a letter, and said merely:~~

~~“Read it.”~~

~~I looked at him. On that narrow, sallow invalid face lay an expression that only death can otherwise evoke, a tremendous solemnity that made me look down at the letter I had taken hold of. And I read:~~

~~Dear Herr Hofmann,~~

~~I owe the knowledge of your address to the kindness of your dear parents, to whom I turned, and I now hope that you will receive these lines in a friendly manner.~~

~~Please permit me, dear Herr Hofmann, to assure you that during these five years I have always thought about you with a feeling of sincere friendship. Were I to assume that your abrupt departure on that day, which was painful for you *and* for me, was meant to evince *anger* toward me and my family, then my distress would be even greater than the dismay and deep astonishment that I felt when you asked me for my daughter’s hand.~~

~~At that time I spoke to you man-to-man, and, at the risk of striking you as brutal, I openly and honestly gave you the reason why I had to deny my daughter’s hand to a man whom I—I cannot emphasize it enough—esteem so greatly in every respect. I spoke to you as a father who is intent on the *lasting* happiness of his only child and who would have conscientiously nipped in the bud any sprouting of such wishes on both sides if the thought of their possibility had ever crossed his mind!~~

~~Today I am speaking to you, my dear Herr Hofmann, in the very same capacities: as a friend and as a father. Five years have flowed by since your departure, and if I had not yet had sufficient leisure to realize how deeply rooted in my daughter is the affection that you were able to inspire in her, then a recent event that recently occurred has fully opened my eyes. Why should I conceal from you the fact that~~

my daughter, at the thought of you, turned down the hand of an excellent gentleman whose courtship as a father, could only urgently endorse?

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The passage of years has had no sway over my daughter's feelings and wishes, and should—this an open and discreet question!—the case be the same with you, my dear Herr Hofmann, then I hereby declare that we parents will offer no further hindrance to the happiness of our child.

I look forward to your reply, for which, whatever it may be, I will be exceedingly grateful, and have nothing to add to these lines aside from the expression of my deepest regard.

Yours devotedly,

Oskar Baron von Stein

I looked up. His hands were on his back, and he was facing the window again. All I asked was:

“Are you going?”

And without looking at me, he replied:

“My belongings have to be ready by tomorrow morning.”

The day wore on with errands and packing, which I helped him with, and in the evening, at my suggestion, we took a final walk through the streets of the city.

The air was still almost unbearably sultry, and an abrupt phosphorous light flashed through the heavens at every second. Paolo looked calm and exhausted, but his breathing was deep and heavy.

Keeping quiet or conversing indifferently, we must have been wandering about for an hour when we halted in front of the Fontana di Trevi, that famous fountain that shows the god of the sea with his racing team of horses.

Once again we spent a long time contemplating and admiring this marvelously vibrant group which, incessantly enveloped in harsh blue lightning, made an almost enchanted impression. My companion said:

“Bernini certainly delights me, even in the works of his disciples. I don't understand his enemies. Granted, if *The Last Judgment* is more sculpted than painted, then the whole of Bernini's oeuvre is more painted than sculpted. But does a greater decorator exist?”

“Do you know the story of the fountain?” I asked. “Whoever drinks from it when leaving Rome will come back. Here you have my traveling glass”—and I filled it at one of the jets of water. “You should see your Rome again!”

He took the glass and brought it to his lips. At that instant, the entire sky flamed up in a dazzling long-lasting, fiery glow, and the thin and delicate vessel shattered to pieces on the edge of the basin.

Paolo took out his handkerchief and blotted the water on his suit.

“I'm nervous and clumsy,” he said. “Let's move on. I hope the glass had no value.”

By the next morning, the weather had cleared. A light-blue summer sky smiled over us as we drove to the railroad station.

Our goodbyes were brief. Paolo shook my hand wordlessly when I wished him happiness, lots of happiness.

I gazed after him for a long time as he stood erect at the broad picture window. Deep solemnity lay in his eyes—and triumph.

What else do I have to say? He is dead; he died the morning after the wedding night—almost during the wedding night.

It had to be. Was it not his will, the will for happiness alone, with which he had kept death at bay for such a long time? He had to die, die without a struggle or resistance, once his will for happiness had been satisfied; he no longer had a pretext for living.

I wondered whether he had wronged, deliberately wronged, the woman he united with. But I saw her at his funeral; she was standing at the head of his coffin. And on her face I noticed the same expression that I had found on his: the grave and powerful solemnity of triumph.

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## LITTLE HERR FRIEDEMANN

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IT WAS THE NURSE'S FAULT. When the first suspicion arose, what good did it do for Frau Consu Friedemann to urge her earnestly to suppress such a vice? What good did it do for Frau Friedemann to let her have a daily glass of red wine as well as the nourishing beer? It suddenly turned out that the girl sank so low as to drink the fuel meant for the alcohol burner. But before she could be dismissed before a replacement for her arrived, the accident occurred. One day, when the mother and her three adolescent daughters came home, little Johannes, who was about a month old, had fallen from the nursery table. He lay on the floor, emitting a dreadfully faint whimper, while the nurse stood next to him in a daze.

The physician, who gingerly but firmly tested the limbs of the wincing, convulsing little creature, made a very, very grave face, the three daughters stood sobbing in a corner, and Frau Friedemann prayed loudly in her anguish.

Before the birth of the child, the poor woman had had to suffer the loss of her husband, the Netherlandish consul, who had been snatched away by a sudden violent illness, and she was still so broken up that she was incapable of hoping that little Johannes might survive for her. But two days later, the physician gave her hand an encouraging squeeze; he explained that the child was absolutely out of immediate danger and that, above all, the slight effect on the brain was entirely eliminated, one could tell by the eyes, which no longer had that same vacant gape.... Naturally they would have to wait and see how things subsequently developed—and they would have to hope for the best, you know, hope for the best....



The gray gabled house where Johannes Friedemann grew up stood at the northern gate of the old, barely middle-sized commercial town. The front door opened into a spacious hallway with a flagstone floor, where a staircase with a white wooden banister led to the upper stories. In the parlor on the next landing, the wallpaper depicted faded landscapes, while stiff-backed chairs surrounded the heavy mahogany table with its dark-red plush cover.

During his childhood he would often linger at the window, in front of which there was always a magnificent display of beautiful flowers, and he would sit on an ottoman at his mother's feet and listen to a wonderful story while gazing at her smooth gray hair and kind, gentle face and breathing in the soft fragrance that she always gave off. Or else he had her show him the picture of his father, a friendly gentleman with gray whiskers. He was in heaven, said the mother, and was waiting for all of them there.

Behind the house there was a small garden, where they would spend a good portion of each summer day despite the sugary haze that nearly always wafted over from a nearby refinery. An old, gnarled



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