

ERNST WIECHERT

*A concentration
camp survivor finds
his healing and
redemption entwined
with that of his
betrayor*

Tidings

← A Novel →

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Ernst Wiechert

Translated from the German by
Marie Heynemann and Margery B. Ledward

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*In jüngeren Tagen war ich des Morgens froh,
des Abends weint ich; jetzt, da ich älter bin,
beginn ich zweifend meinen Tag, doch
heilig und heiter ist mir sein Ende.*

HOELDERLIN

*When I was younger I was happy in the morning,
and I slept in the evening; now as I have grown older
I begin my day in doubt, but
holy and serene is its end for me.*

SO THAT WAS HOW a man walked when death had touched him between the shoulders.

He walked as lightly as if he had wings, but below the ground something moved with him, and that which moved beneath his feet was not light and had no wings, but was dark and heavy like the juice of poppy seeds.

But what did he who walked into the night know of the juice of poppy seeds? He could stand at the side of the road leaning his back against one of the apple trees, as above him under the full May moon the early dew fell on the clustering pink flower buds. He could shut his eyes, and the picture of the red blossoms of poppies at the edge of a yellow wheat field might appear before his closed eyes and the picture of a child who stood there shyly touching the blossoms, as if they were enchanted.

It was all far away and unreal as in a dream – the poppies, the field, and the child's hand.

There were no children's hands anymore – nowhere and never again, and the red of the poppies changed into another red which flowed together out of stains fused into a crimson liquid which ran on till it skirted the edge of the field, of all the fields of this earth; yes, right on to the rim of this dark star which rushed noiselessly along through the May night on into other constellations. And it seemed as if the constellations fell back before the star with

the bloody rim into the outlines of the Milky Way to give it free space and to open for it the icy infinity which awaited it behind the constellation of Hercules.

The man under the apple tree opened his eyes and made a wry mouth. Over him hung stars, the full moon, and the Milky Way. Nothing had gone out of its course, and nothing would ever go out of its course. A voice began to sing behind the fields, but it was only the voice of a drunkard, as most of the voices had been which he had heard this evening. It was not the voice which he had expected to hear, that lonely, shadowed, distant and once uttered tone which would be pronouncing the words of judgment over the trembling earth: "He who sheds the blood of man, his blood shall be shed also."

A word – a field – a child – sunk into oblivion. And never more and nowhere would they rise again.

The man sighed and stepped back into the bright road, out of the shadow of the apple tree. He shivered in his brown suit which looked like a uniform of some kind, and he hung the coat over his bent shoulders. The coat was striped blue and white, a gay coat, but children avoided it, and grown people turned their heads away as if they had not seen it.

An hour later the man sat on the parapet of a village fountain and watched the moonlit jet of water which flowed into the basin. His feet ached in the new shoes which the victors had given him. He took some dry bread out of the pocket of his coat and held it under the flowing water before he slowly ate it. Then he smoked one of the strong, foreign cigarettes that they had stuffed into his pockets and gazed at the dark gables behind which the moon was shining. There were still lights in many of the little windows.

"There they sit and wait for the future," he thought. "All these years they have waited for the future. First for one of glory, now for that of the Prodigal Son. People are always waiting for the future, condemned by this terrible conception of time. The animal does not know a tomorrow – nor does God. Eternity has no tomorrow.

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But they are waiting. Just as I am waiting. Perhaps I am more patient than they are, perhaps I am only more wicked than they, colder and more deadened. I was dead, and so the children turn from me. Animals and children scent death.”

He pressed out the cigarette on the rim of the fountain and got up. There was not far to go now. He could see the castle on the mountain behind the gables. It was lit up from top to bottom, and it occurred to him that Belshazzar’s castle might have looked something like it. “Midnight already drew near . . .” So many verses which he had learned as a child came to mind. There was now no hand which wrote on a white wall. Only the airplanes wrote letters of fire.

From here on he knew every turn of the road. He had often been here. He had loved the barren, melancholy landscape, and it was from here that they had fetched him. What people call time had passed, but for him there was no time anymore. He had been taken out of the fiery furnace, and now he had grown rigid. But he was not cleansed. Perhaps he had been taken out of the red heat too soon, perhaps too late. Only love cleanses, not violence. And he did not love anymore.

He walked up to the bright windows, because they belonged to him. He had inherited them, that’s what he had been told. But he did not know whether a heritage was still valid, since all heritage had been wasted – that of generations and that of many centuries. He only went there to find a roof perhaps, a piece of bread, a fountain with water. If he did not find it there, he would walk on or sit down on a doorstep until the night frost fell over him.

He stopped for a while to give his heart a rest and turned around. The village lay below him in the valley and the steep roofs were shining in the light of the moon. The road ran like a white ribbon into the dark hills. A dog barked in the distance, and it sounded like a voice crying in the wilderness. In just such villages as these were born the men who have exalted the name of the nation, he thought. In quiet, darkness, and namelessness. And also those

others were born in such villages: the hangmen and the murderers, and nobody knows whether they have not in their blood a drop of that which flowed in the veins of those who wrote the great melodies or the wisdom of their centuries. Wheat and thistles grow in the same field.

A shooting star drew a silver trail from the zenith to the dark northern horizon. Yet he did not think of wishing for anything. But he raised his tired eyes to the sparkling canopy of heaven. He felt the magnitude, the purity and the inexpressible strangeness of space – space had neither regarded nor taken part in what had happened: in what had happened for years, by day and by night. Cries had not reached it, nor curses, nor prayers. Constellations had risen and had set. Everything that had happened had noiselessly rushed with the turning axis into that sparkling space on and on toward the distant constellation of Hercules.

Was it beautiful, what he saw? Did happiness flow down upon his brow from that eternity? He had forgotten beauty and happiness and probably also eternity, which was not eternity at all but only an immeasurable time.

A bird called in the high forest behind him and he was startled. He turned round and his right hand slipped into his pocket. Somebody seemed to be walking behind him, lightly and stealthily, as the dead will walk – the dead who no longer wear any shoes. He had not pulled them off, but others would have seen to that. Shoes had become valuable.

He sighed and began climbing again. His shoulders ached with the straps of the haversack which they had filled with food for him. But he knew that he was carrying more than bread and provisions. Everybody had to carry an immense burden once his hair turned gray. Time, memory, the child he once had been. The living and the dead. They had learned how heavy the dead were to carry. Nothing had been added to their substance, and yet they were as heavy as if they were made of stone.

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“Settle yourself down up there, I’ll carry you all right, I’m not afraid,” he said gently. He had often talked to himself in these last years, because he had not spoken to anybody else. He did not want to become dumb.

He stopped and bowed his shoulders, as if he wished to make it easier for the other. But he did not feel anything. Nor had he felt anything when he had been carrying stones. He had dismissed his heart. And you can only feel the dead on your heart, not on your shoulders.

He climbed now without stopping until he stood before the archway of stone which opened into the yard. The great building with the steep roof glittered in front of him up into the starlit vault, and noise, singing and the music of loudspeakers came from all the windows. But he paid no heed to it. He looked up at the coat of arms above the gate and tried to distinguish in the light of the moon the blue field with the golden lilies carved into the stone. It was no longer there. Probably they had thrown stones at it or shot at it with pistols. Only the gray crumbling stone was left. He sighed, but it was right that it should be so. Evidently this was what they called the “new time.” People always called it a new time when they washed the blood off their hands.

Only then did he notice the two figures near the archway who stood in the shadow of the lilac bushes: the man with a white, not very clean tunic and the girl who tried to hide a heavy bag behind her back.

“Well, old friend, what do you want here?” asked the man, taking a cigarette from his pocket and lighting it. “The lost time, young friend,” was the reply.

The man in the white tunic gazed at him attentively with a suspicious expression. He was still young and his insignificant features showed only the shifty self-assurance of those who stand under the protection of the victors – no matter where they had stood previously.

"You can go on looking for that," he said mockingly after a while. "But beggars are not allowed here."

"Where there is stealing there is not any begging," replied the man in the coat. "Don't bother about your bag," he said to the girl, "I shall not take anything away from you."

The girl cast a contemptuous look at the striped coat which was still hanging round the man's shoulders. "That's all done away with, that about taking away," she said.

"Only the roles have changed," replied the man. "But I would like to know who lives here now?" he added, nodding toward the lighted windows.

"And why do you want to know that?" asked the young man.

"Because it belongs to me, so to say, my young friend."

The young friend took the cigarette out of his mouth and stared at him in surprise. "Two others have already been here pretending that," he said at last.

"Yes, and I am the third," replied the man with the coat. "But it is grand that the other two were here. One does not know nowadays who is still alive."

"I am sorry, Herr Baron," said the young man not very politely, "but now the Amis live here."

"Who are the Amis?"

"The Americans; and a whole staff is quartered here. I help in the kitchen."

"That's a good job," replied the man in a friendly tone, glancing for a moment at the girl's bag. "I don't want anything. I have enough. And you probably have gone hungry for a long time."

"God knows, we have," said the girl rudely.

"I just wanted to see it," the man went on, looking up again at the broken coat of arms. "I have often been here."

"And then?"

"Then I did not come here anymore. I was prevented, my young friend. But the two others you spoke of, do you know where they are now?"

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The young man took the cigarette out of the corner of his mouth and pointed with it over the archway toward the wooded hills on which the moon was shining. "In the shepherd's hut, Herr Baron," he said, and one could not tell whether he was glad or sorry about it. "Do you know the hut, Herr Baron?"

"I know it well," replied the man, "it is a beautiful place up there. I liked to go there in times gone by. Thank you for the information." And he turned to go.

The kitchen hand looked uncertainly at the tall, bent figure which even under the striped coat had the air of owning all this: the coat of arms over the archway, the illuminated castle and the distant sheepfold. He took a cigarette from his pocket, made a movement to offer it to the baron, but on second thoughts he took out the open packet with the other hand and offered it to him. "Help yourself, Herr Baron," he said.

"Thank you, my friend," said the baron pleasantly. "They gave me plenty."

The young servant pushed the packet back into his pocket and shrugged his narrow shoulders with a commiserating gesture. "Perhaps it is just as well," he said with an overly familiar smile, "if nowadays barons have to live for a bit in a shepherd's hut."

The baron did not return the smile, but he raised his hand in a friendly farewell greeting. "Better, probably," he answered quietly, "than if sheep had to live in castles. As time went on, it would not suit them."

At this the young pair looked a little embarrassed, but Baron Amadeus resumed his climb, passing by the courtyard of the castle up the narrow path which led to the heath, the marshes and the peat bogs to where the sheepfold stood. He remembered it all very well, he could have found the path even in the dark. He had not been pleased with these two young people, but he had only gone a few steps when they were forgotten. They were no different from those he had met on his way. No victory and no defeat ever pierced to the roots. Nothing but death reached the roots; and then only

if it were admitted to man's vital soul, not simply to the vital point of the body.

But it was splendid that the shepherd's hut was still there – and splendid that his brothers were there – not exactly that they were in the sheepfold – but that they were alive, that they had not been killed in front of a red bespattered wall or under the gallows.

Baron Amadeus had loved but little in his life: music, a few books, his home country and his two brothers. Everything else had sunk as a stone sinks in the sea; but his brothers, even if they had been killed, would only have sunk into the depths of his heart. People had often laughed at them in childhood, and ridicule binds together more closely than pity. Simple people had laughed at them because they were so much alike. Their hair was brown and soft like the fur of a mole, their noses were a little too long and set a little askew in their narrow faces. Others had been amused at the queer seriousness with which they met fun as well as malice, an expression so unusual in immature faces, the composure of which resembled that on the faces of young martyrs or youthful saints.

A wit on a neighboring estate had nicknamed them the “trip-tych,” and that is how they appeared to the unthinking, as if one had only to open the two wings of an altarpiece – and there they would be, standing side by side, three youthful figures from some place beyond the well-known earth, and one of them might well be holding a medieval lute in his long, thin hands, the second a violin, and the third some instrument with which the songs of the Old Testament might have been accompanied. So they seemed to look at the spectator from that sphere with their strange, pure faces without a smile, but with the joyfulness that belongs to those who have touched the hem of God's garment.

In their father's private rooms, which lay in a distant part of the house, each of them, while still quite young, had found for himself some musical instrument, and under the imperfect instruction of a rather unorthodox tutor they had begun to attune these three instruments to one another and to play them with unshakable

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seriousness. After a few years their mother had commanded them to play before guests for the first time at a birthday party.

They sat down in silence under the candles of the old chandelier and with their solemn faces and stately instruments they had begun to play one of the old masters, perhaps Tartini.

They played until a whisper was heard or a slight smile was seen on the faces of some of the guests, then Amadeus got up with his cello in the middle of the delicate *andante*, bowed seriously, and left the hall, followed immediately by his two brothers. He had not spoken to his brothers about this occurrence, and from his unmoved face there was nothing to be gathered about the causes that had prompted this action. Before the embittered anger of his mother he had only remarked in a polite and gentle voice that just this *andante* was the musical interpretation of the thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians and that this chapter must be well-known to the countess, his mother.

From that time on they had never again played in public.

On the height which the baron had reached by now a soft wind blew which smelled of the peat bogs, and Amadeus sat down for a while on one of the blocks of basalt which lay by the path. The wood was now sparser and more stunted and in the distance the moonlight lay on the bare rock, which shone like silver.

The thoughts of the baron wandered for a little from the thirteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Corinthians to his mother who was called Countess or My Lady by the farmers, and who in respect for her birth wished to be addressed in this way. The Liljecronas who originally came from Sweden had always been a “doubtful” family for her, a family of peasants probably from the dark ages of the Vikings, and she did not consider it impossible that a few hundred years ago they had still eaten horseflesh and had sacrificed human beings to their one-eyed god.

Amadeus did not remember that his mother had ever kissed him, and he could not even imagine how her thin lips would have been able to do so. Only Grita, the old Lithuanian nurse, had

kissed him. On holy days she wore seven petticoats one on top of the other, and under these seven petticoats she would hide easily and willingly anything that she wished to protect against Laima, the goddess of destiny – whether it was a young chicken which was to be killed or one of the child-saints of the triptych who wished to hide from the countess. On the battlefields of the children’s lives Grita had been the asylum of which they had read in the history of the Middle Ages, the threshold of the sanctuary beyond which the sword did not reach, the peace of God which must not be violated.

Amadeus smoked and remembered the tunes of the Dainos, those Lithuanian folk songs which Grita used to hum in the evenings, when the scent of baked apples came from the oven and the thread of her spinning wheel glided through her old, twisted hands. Eastern melodies, old and melancholy. Amadeus had set them for the three stringed instruments, and Grita had listened to their playing, her white head bent, and then she had raised her face with the peculiar eyes to the playing youths and had smiled as only idols can smile, and had sung in a low voice:

By the Memel’s farther shore
 Stand three maples fresh and green
 Underneath these green trees, underneath their branches
 On a day three cuckoos sat.

No, those were not cuckoos three
 ‘Twas not birds were cooing so.
 Fellows three were fighting here
 Fighting o’er a maiden fair
 Under these three maple trees.

Said the first one: “She is mine,”
 Said the second: “As God wills.”
 But the third, the youngest lad,
 Was so sore, oh, sore at heart.

Fain would move into the town,
 Seek a fiddler for you there.

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Dance, my laddie, full of sorrow,
Dance, I want you to be gay . . .

They had riveted their attention on the song, “the three young fellows,” and had shivered with that early foreboding of defenseless creatures under the trampling feet of humankind. And later, much later, Amadeus had gone to the old nurse when she was sitting on the threshold with folded hands in the twilight and had asked: “Grita, what does that mean: ‘Dance, my laddie, full of sorrow, dance, I want you to be gay’?”

She had wrapped her large dark shawl around him, for she had felt the trembling of his young, narrow shoulders and she had answered gently: “Leave it now, young master, until you have learned that tears are salt and a kiss is sweet. And that this is better than if it were the other way round.”

He remembered that they had played this tune by many cottagers’ coffins: “Dance, my laddie, full of sorrow . . .” Their mother had always looked at them through her gold-rimmed lorgnette, as if they were three adopted children who talked to each other in a foreign language – the language of the American Indians or of the Polynesians. But the cottagers’ wives had wept, and after one of these funerals as they stood silently at the lofty window of their music room, their father had come in quietly, had stood behind them and said in his gentle voice which seemed as if it came from a distance: “He who builds a bridge for the poor is more than he who builds an empire for kings . . .”

They had pondered about it for a long time, each for himself, for they never discussed such things with each other – and besides, it was such a rare thing for their father to speak to them.

The moon had now sunk to the horizon, and the baron took another cigarette.

Yes, what had the secret about their father been, that none of them had really known anything about him; that nobody had known him, and yet that in some strange way he had been familiar to them? As the outline of a sail on the ocean – that’s what he

had been like, and nobody knew where the wind would drive him, and whether it was the wind of destiny or an altogether strange and unknown wind. There was a close affinity between them and their father, not only because he had the same hair and the same somewhat irregularly shaped features. There was also the unapproachableness in his face – nothing haughty about it, but a reserve, a remoteness as of one who was different from others – and his melancholy eyes said, as is written in the Bible: “Your thoughts are not my thoughts.” But they said so without haughtiness, shyly and almost timidly, as if they knew and could not help it.

To the countess and the well-to-do neighbors he was only somebody who “did nothing”; but how should they know what filled his days and nights? He lived apart, even in his rooms, and Amadeus remembered very well how he had stood there for the first time among books, globes, musical instruments, boxes full of stones, coins, and butterflies. “What are you doing, father?” he had asked. And the baron, raising his eyes from the microscope, had looked at him full of kindness and had answered gently: “I am collecting, Amadeus.” “And what are you collecting, father?”

“The grain of mustard seed, dear child, and one day you will collect it too.” “And my brothers, father dear?” “They will do so too, Amadeus, you three will. For all the others here” – and he made a wide, sweeping movement with his hand – “all the others collect the fat of the land.”

Amadeus had not asked further questions, nor had his brothers, but he had thought it over thoroughly, as he was wont to think. After that he had often gone into the quiet, solemn rooms which were somehow like a warm church, and that was in itself something special, for Amadeus only knew the icy-cold village church. He had knelt for many hours before the old folio volumes and tried to understand the peculiar titles, before he turned the first page: *The whole of the Prophet Jeremiah / in these hard and dangerous times / to teach and comfort pious Christians / interpreted. Item /*

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the Prophet Sophonias / interpreted by Nicholaum Selneccerum / Luc. 13 / If you do not repent – you will all perish. Anno 1566.

Then in their last year at school their father had also “perished.” From one of his walks the baron had not come home. He had disappeared as a sail behind the horizon or as a cloud in the evening sky, and no trace of him was ever found. He had left nothing but a strip of paper on his desk and on it he had written in his graceful, old-fashioned handwriting: “Lord, thou hast deceived me and I was deceived.” Long afterward Amadeus had found this saying in the twentieth chapter of the Prophet Jeremiah.

There had been a great stir in the district, and the countess felt this stir as an unparalleled disgrace. One did not leave the world anonymously, not even if one’s name was only Liljecrona. Tramps or saints might do so. “I do not believe that he is dead,” she said to her most intimate friend. “He was too awkward for that. I believe that he has gone to Africa, where they still sacrifice human beings – as his ancestors did. There was too much peasant and heathen blood in him.”

They searched for him for many months, but he was not found.

The brothers did not speak about this either. But they did not play their trios any longer in one of their own rooms, but in their father’s large, forsaken library. “The whole of the Prophet Jeremiah” lay open on the big oak table, and now and again one or the other of them stood before it and his eyes went over the strange words: “And I was deceived.”

At that time Grita was still alive, and she was the only one to whom Amadeus turned with a question: “Do you believe that he is dead?” he whispered.

She smiled and stroked his smooth hair: “How should he be dead, as he was so sad?” she replied.

And when he looked at her inquiringly, she took the full spindle from her spinning wheel and turned it in her twisted fingers. “He has spun to the end of the thread,” she said, “and now he has taken a new spindle. God has given him a new thread.”

This was a great consolation for Amadeus, and he thought it wrong to keep it to himself, and in the evening he told his brothers.

"I have always thought," said Erasmus, the eldest, after a while, "that he sits by the shore of one of the holy rivers in India and smiles. Nobody could smile as he could. Just as if he were at one with God. He had gone through all this on earth, and he had seen that one must start all over again."

With a slight shock Amadeus had noticed how his brother made the same sweeping movement with his hand that their father had made that time when he spoke of "the fat of the land."

"More and more stars," thought Amadeus looking up into the sky. "As if a thousand new ones had been added in all those years when I did not see a star. It will soon be midnight, and I must get up now."

But he sat on, his hands laid together as if they were still fettered.

They had not had an easy time at school. Even their Christian names had been a source of amusement and probably also of ridicule. Erasmus, Aegidius, Amadeus. Evidently they had their origin in their father's old folio volumes and in his veneration of a time when God still bent over the shoulder of the writer. "He still looked at it," he used to say. "He did not look away, as He does today."

But they had got over these years. When they entered the classroom one after the other, tall, slim, with a faraway look in their eyes, it always seemed to the others that emissaries of another nation had arrived, and as if they carried gold and precious stones in their pockets. They answered but they never asked, and the most self-confident teachers lost a little of the brilliance of their diction when these three pairs of eyes looked fixedly at them. "Liljecrona, you always seem to be pretending you have a king's crown under your coat," said one of them to Erasmus with suppressed irritation. "Do take it out so that we can see whether it is made of gold or brass."

"We have no crowns under our coats," replied Erasmus gently and politely. "And if we had, this would probably not be the right place to show them around."

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At the time when the old baron reached his end, the school had tried not to show any curiosity. But at the beginning of winter when there had been a fire in the poor quarters of the little town, and the school authorities thought of helping those who had suffered through it by arranging a benefit concert, the headmaster had called the three brothers to his office and had asked them in a kindly way whether on such an occasion and for such a good purpose they would be willing to play – for everybody knew that they played music together.

Yes, they would do so, Erasmus, the eldest, had replied without having consulted his brothers.

They had chosen a slow and very stately movement by Mozart. None of the audience would ever forget how they sat on the platform with the light of the candles on their music stands falling on their thin, serious faces. They had not looked at their music but straight past each other into a distance which was perhaps filled with quiet faces and forebodings. Those who listened would not forget how the musicians drew their bows across the strings, how they picked up from each other the simple, golden melodies, which fell apart and then wove together again, while they listened to the inner tones of their instruments without any alteration of their general bearing. They only seemed to give out what a distant voice whispered to them, while they were living with and in each other with the same simplicity as in their daily life, and with the same remoteness that separated them from people at other times. It was as if a spell emanating from them fell over the audience, over the unimaginative, nay, over the most ordinary hearts. All felt not only that the melody of the great, dead musician enclosed them in its web, but that they were overwhelmed by the purity and simplicity of these three youths, whose lives were perhaps as strange and peculiar as the life and the end of their father, but no curiosity and no mockery were allowed to touch it, because they sat there as in an altar picture; and it must have been a pious hand which had painted them.

When they had finished and let their bows fall and walked slowly out of the hall, no one stirred, but the headmaster, who was sitting in the last row, got up and bowed to them, when they went past him, and after a pause he turned to the music master who sat at his side and said: "They did not play for the people who have been burned out; they played for their father."

That was the first time they had played in public since their childhood.

"More and more stars," thought Amadeus clasping his hands round his knees. "And I fancied that all light had been extinguished in these years."

Yes, and then Erasmus entered a cavalry regiment as a second lieutenant, and Aegidius had taken over the large estate, and he, Amadeus, in his turn had studied, and sitting at the large oak table, with "the whole of the Prophet Jeremiah" open in front of him, had written down verses and melodies and had slowly gone his father's way of "doing nothing," as the methodical people said.

Yet there was so much to be done, so immeasurably much. For years and decades; and just now under the silent stars it seemed to him as if centuries had passed. For if nothing else could be done, there was one thing that had to be done: to try to find the hidden meaning of a song that fishergirls sang on the sand dunes of Kurland:

Dance, my laddie, full of sorrow,
Dance, I want you to be gay.

Grita had known it even when she was spinning her shroud. But he did not know it, and neither the folio volumes nor the microscope could impart that to him. He who relies only on the intellect must walk with crutches, even though they be set with precious stones, and at the first breath of fate will break like matchsticks.

Of the old people there was now only Christoph, the coachman, left, and often Amadeus sat with him at dusk on the oat bin. On the large estates in the eastern provinces the coachman had always

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been of special importance, because the horses, too, had been of particular importance. The faithful coachmen were the imperturbable kings among all the retainers on the estate. They drove the babies to church to be christened, the young couples to be married, and the dead in their coffins to be buried, and in the twilight of their stables the young sons learned the wisdom of a long life of service.

Christoph had light blue eyes and a small beard under his clean-shaven chin. The beard, at that time, was already white. He was the only one who addressed Amadeus with the familiar “Du.” He said Herr Baron – but then he fell back into the familiar form of speech.

“You must not worry so much, Herr Baron,” he said, drawing at his short pipe on whose porcelain bowl there was a brightly colored picture of the old emperor. “Not about his lordship, your father, either. All is well with your father, the old lord, for he has gone to the nether world, do you understand? Some go to join those in the heavenly world, but then we do not hear them anymore. But the others – a man can hear them – if he doesn’t go out to look for them.”

“Do you hear him, Christoph?”

The coachman took the pipe out of his mouth and nodded. “Sometimes, Herr Baron,” he said very quietly.

“Where the three big juniper bushes stand on the moor, before one passes the peat bog – that’s where I hear him. The horses get restive there, because a little light stands among the heather. And then I hear him say: ‘Well, how are you and everybody, Christoph?’ and I answer, ‘Things are all right, Herr Baron.’ Then we drive past and the light disappears. You see, he has gone down again, Herr Baron.”

“You can still do that,” Amadeus said after a while. “Your feet still reach into the underworld.”

Christoph shook his head doubtfully, pressing the tobacco more tightly into his pipe. “I don’t know, Herr Baron, whether it’s the feet,” he said. “I think it’s because we still have faith. Never let anyone drive you four-in-hand, Herr Baron, as the countess does. Whoever drives four-in-hand has lost his faith. Christ went on foot.”

Yes, much had flowed into him in his childhood – mysterious and incongruous tales. It had probably helped him to come through the years, the tens of years, the First World War and the revolution, the collapse of a nation and the decay of the Western world. Those mysterious powers of the underworld had protected him, that which was incomprehensible to reason, yes, that at which reason smiled. The spinning wheel and the oat bin had been more to him than the folio volumes. Long before books had been written people had spun – even in the earliest fairytales, and while they were spinning they had sung: “Dance, my laddie, full of sorrow, dance, I want you to be gay . . .” And that’s perhaps what he did, even when it seemed to others that he did nothing.

And now at last he got up. The light of the moon still shone over the world and from a distance the wind brought now and again the fragment of a tune from a loudspeaker. It sounded as if a delirious patient were talking in his sleep.

“That’s what they have kept,” thought Amadeus while he climbed up among the stones. “Victors and vanquished, dancing. But not full of sorrow. Not even the defeated are full of sorrow – to say nothing of their gaiety.”

The air had become cooler and the juniper bushes stood like dark pilgrims among the heather, each with its long shadow. The moonlight made everything unreal. A softly sparkling world, but it was unreal and unsubstantial. The dead had as much room in it as the living, and the baron had seen so many dead people.

Then behind a wood of low pine trees, there was the shepherd’s hut. Dark and massive, with its steep low gable, and the moonlight shone like silver on the thatched reed roof. Amadeus had no home now and would never have one again, but there might be a roof to cover him in this ruined world, and this, thatched and gray, looked as if it might have space under it for innocent animals and for guilty human beings. It was an old roof, and the shepherd had spent a life under it, and he had learned silence and wisdom. Amadeus had often sat with him on the threshold, from which could be seen a

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vast expanse of sky and a view over the Vogelsberg on one hand and over the Thueringer Wald on the other. The earth here was poor and barren, but the landscape was grand and lonely, and here the shepherd had had his visions, and his face had been shaped by this country, as these rocks had been shaped by the subterranean fires millions of years ago.

It was from this threshold that they had fetched him. The last he had seen was the tall, lean figure of the shepherd holding up his crook under the drifting clouds. And the last he had heard had been his fearless, solemn voice calling as from a mouth of brass: "He who makes prisoners shall himself be taken to prison. He who takes the sword, shall perish by the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints."

Two of them had only turned and jeered, but the third had looked round and made a threatening gesture with his fist.

Throughout four long years Amadeus had searched for it: the patience and the faith of the saints. He had not found it.

Ah, and now he would see them again, his two brothers, and he was afraid. So afraid that his heart throbbed and his hands trembled, when he saw the feeble gleam of light behind the reed curtain of the small window.

He was afraid for many reasons, his heart was afraid, and reason could not give a name to it. What he first realized was that he was afraid to touch a human being. Not only was he afraid of their words and opinions, their looks and gestures. But there was an actual physical fear of touching them. When a man has slept for a long time on a plank bed with two others, he no longer thinks of the human body as something sacred. When one's habitation has been a dark, airless room filled with the bodies, the breathing, the groaning, and the delirium of human beings, he recoils before men, unless he has "the patience and the faith of the saints." But he did not have them.

As he did not possess them, he wanted nothing but to hide himself like an animal in a thicket. He had been branded and he had not yet got so far that he could transform the mark.

He was afraid because these men were his brothers and he felt that he loved them. He had believed that love was dead in his heart, and now he realized that this was not true. The shy, unspoken love of their childhood, youth, and manhood flamed up in his heart, as soon as he saw the gleam of light. He remembered how they had gone together through the vast loneliness of life, and how different they had been from others in everything: in their faces, their names, the music they played, even in the way they opened and closed a book.

But the other two had remained undamaged, or they would not be here. They had not been free from peril, but they had remained in the cleanliness of their old existence. Their bodies had not been seized, they had not been whipped, and they had not been forced to suffer the feet of tyrants trampling upon them. They could look at their bodies without feeling disgust. They were still clean. They could look in a mirror; there was nothing but the face of their father and behind this the faces of all those who had been like him: quiet, sad, noble, and good.

And there was something that he must know before he stepped over the threshold; and still more it was what they must know before their hands, wearing the signet ring of the family, were offered to him: not that he was no longer good, but that he was bad. It was not important that he was no longer clean, nor undamaged, nor proud, but that he was bad. That with all the power of his blood he hated the murderers and perhaps many of the murdered. He would not mind pointing his revolver at any of those faces with the rigid, sightless masks, at many of those faces arrayed one beside another as before a firing squad. He had already done this with his own hand. And he did not repent it. He held his hand before his eyes and looked at it. The weals and scars showed up even in the light of the moon. It was no longer the hand which had handled the bow in obedience to the tunes which the great dead musicians had devised and written down. It had become a different hand. No lonely hand anymore, only belonging to itself, to a sealed, silent

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world, but one that had stretched itself out or had been stretched out to the world of violence and evil, and there it had changed. It would not be seen, but his heart knew it. And from his hand the transformation had spread into the innermost recesses of his heart. He had not been incorruptible or this would not have happened. It had not sufficed to live in purity and quiet and “to do nothing.” He had closed his eyes against the evil of the world, and the evil had found him defenseless. And if not defenseless, vulnerable and infirm. He had not had “faith,” as Grita and Christoph had. His roots had reached into the depths of the earth but not further. And so the blow of the ax had struck into his marrow.

He glanced around – stealthily and hastily – as he had done for four years. There was still time to go. The brothers would never know. He was dead for them, and their last tiny spark of hope would be put out if he did not come back within a few months. They would mourn for him, as millions were mourned in this devastated world. He would remain for them a pure picture broken to pieces by a brutal hand.

He took a step back – stealthily and noiselessly, as an animal when the branches part before it. But at that moment the heavy door of the hut was pushed aside, and Erasmus stood before a dimly illuminated background. He stood there like an apparition which had emerged from mystery into reality, and without making a movement he gazed at the figure in the moonlight.

Then Amadeus raised his hand – in the way they had hailed each other from a distance when they were children – and Erasmus recognized the gesture.

“Brother,” he whispered, stretching out his arms.

And then Amadeus stood on the threshold.

It was the small room which the shepherd had used as a living room. With a wooden partition they had divided it off from the large, dark barn and had hung it with mats of rushes. The same clay hearth in whose glowing embers the shepherd used to roast mushrooms stood in the corner and a small peat fire was still burning under the ashes.

But the room was no longer empty and bare as it had been formerly. It was full of old furniture, from centuries gone by, and Amadeus recognized that it had come from the castle. His eyes dwelt on everything, and on the two faces turned to him in silence, and at last they rested on the three music stands on one of which a candle was burning, its calm light shining on the three instruments. Sheets of music stood open on the stands.

“You have . . .” said Amadeus in a low voice.

“Yes, brother,” replied Aegidius, “this is what we have saved. This is nearly all.”

Then he got up from his seat at the hearth and came slowly toward Amadeus. He did not touch him. He only stroked along the folds of the coat which hung over Amadeus’ shoulders. It was the striped coat of which the children had been afraid and from which the eyes of the adults had looked away. Time and again he raised his hand and stroked down the rough, dirty material. It was as if he was stroking something that was alive and needed protection – a sick animal, perhaps, or a child that had been hit.

And under this movement Amadeus slowly closed his eyes. He had fixed them on his brother’s face which was quite close to him, and he had gazed into his brother’s eyes, which had followed the movement of his hand. He was not looking at his gray hair, nor at the deep lines around his thin-lipped mouth. He only gazed into his eyes, and perhaps he felt without realizing it that he had not seen such eyes for many years. Eyes which in some incomprehensible way had been allowed to retain in this world “the patience and faith of the saints.”

Then when Amadeus raised his hand, they took the coat and the haversack gently from his shoulders and led him to the old easy chair by the fire. Erasmus put some wood on the glowing embers, and then they sat with their hands clasped between their knees and gazed into the flames. Their faces between light and shadow were again as the faces on the triptych – faces of young martyrs or

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saints, strange, cleansed faces without a smile, but one could read in them that they had been in “a fiery furnace.”

They did not speak, and only after a long time, when they were smoking the cigarettes which Amadeus had taken out of his pocket, Erasmus bent down toward the fire and put a dark, twisted root in the dying flames and in a low voice recited the verses of their childhood: “By the Memel’s farther shore stand three maples fresh and green . . .”

He stopped short, because he felt his brothers’ eyes on him, and when he raised his head he saw that in their shy glances was a hardly perceptible reproach.

Then he thrust the dark, twisted root better into the glowing embers and clasped his hands again between his knees, and thus the three remained until a thin white ash began to form over the dying glow.

